

Ransom

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Ransom

by [Anonemoni](#)

Summary

“They sent a photo... and...”

“And?” Diluc gritted his teeth.

Jean closed her eyes slowly. Her hands were crossed primly on the desk in front of her. Her shoulders were tense, taut like bowstrings- “A finger... And his eyepatch.”

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Kaeya gets kidnapped, and it's up to Jean and Diluc to save him!

### Notes

This one is going to be at least 2, but ideally 4 chapters for the next four prompts.

Unfortunately I only have the first two written so far

But hopefully I'll get days 8 and 9 written by the end of October 😊

I'm not even gonna pretend to promise they'll be posted on their correct dates haha

We'll see... I'm pretty busy

See the end of the work for more [notes](#)

## Proof of Life

***-Ransom-***

***Diluc***

“You’re certain it’s him.” Diluc kept measured control over his facial expression and breathing.

Give away nothing. It had been his modus operandi for nearly four years now.

And while Jean could easily read him like a book, the other two present hadn’t even been members of the knights before Diluc had left the Ordo-

“Yes, Diluc. We’re certain...” Jean’s tone was measured. Careful- “We’re doing everything we can to get him back, but I felt you should know the situation-”

“How do you know.” A question without the proper inflection.

Kaeya would give him shit for the rude tone. Were he present.

“They sent a photo... and...”

“And?” Diluc gritted his teeth.

Jean closed her eyes slowly. Her hands were crossed primly on the desk in front of her. Her shoulders were tense, taut like bowstrings- “A finger... And his eyepatch.”

Diluc grunted.

Jean studied him closely.

“Let me see.”

Jean grimaced, “That is not necessary-”

Diluc’s mask cracked. His eye twitched-

Jean sighed, “Master Diluc, I can assure you that the knights are taking proper measures to ensure-”

“Let. Me. See.”

Jean’s shoulders slumped. Then she stood wearily, “Follow me...”

Diluc followed her out of the room.

The Acting Grandmaster ordered the other two knights to stay behind.

—

“Their camp is in the eastern part of the Whispering Woods.” Jean started talking once they were out of earshot. She held the door to the evidence room open, “On the surface, we are negotiating-”

“Well that’s fucking stupid.” Diluc’s voice was a growl. He was losing it.

Jean grimaced, “If you’re going to be an asshole, then-” She worked her jaw as she glared at him.

It was an awkward standoff, to say the least.

“Then what.”

“Then nothing,” She turned on her heel and walked along an aisle. She pulled out a small box.

Diluc prepared for the worst as she brought it back toward the entrance- to a long table suitable for examining things. Evidence-type things-

He felt himself frown as she pulled out the photograph and the patch, but nothing else, “I thought you said there was also-”

The look Jean gave him was incredulous. To say the least- “Diluc. Do you really think we would keep a rotten *finger* in evidence storage? How, pray tell, do you think that would work?” She practically slammed the eyepatch and photograph on the table.

Diluc winced. He worked his jaw for a moment, feeling... intensely stupid.

Then he bottled up and buried those feelings along with all the others.

He picked up the photograph.

It was half-soaked- stained with dried blood.

Kaeya’s blood.

His *brother’s* blood.

Slightly difficult to distinguish, but still very clearly him, Kaeya *glared* through the lense of the camera.

He was bound and gagged. And obviously pissed as hell. His scar was clearly visible. Diluc could almost imagine the anger was truly directed at him.

He wondered if it was taken before or after they’d severed his finger.

Then he forced himself to at least *try* to look for any sort of identifying landmarks or hints within the photo-

“Can you handle this, Diluc?” Jean’s no nonsense tone sliced through his thoughts like a knife.

Diluc glared at her, “Why wouldn’t I be able to handle something as trivial as Treasure Hoarders.”

Jean scoffed, “Well, fuck you too, then.” Her arms crossed over her chest.

Diluc’s face scrunched.

Jean glared, “Those ‘Trivial Treasure Hoarders’ managed to incapacitate and kidnap your *brother*, so if you’re not going to cooperate, then-”

“He’s not my brother.” Diluc felt the burn of the words on his tongue. Felt the way they melted through him like acid-

*Why did I say that...?*

*I don't mean that so why do I keep saying it...?*

Jean stared.

Diluc stared.

Then she ripped the photograph right out of his hands, "Sorry for wasting your time, then, Master Ragnvindr."

"What-"

"I'll have to ask you to leave now. I don't feel comfortable discussing the details of this case with someone outside of his immediate family-"

Diluc scoffed, "This isn't some medical procedure! This is a fucking *ransom*, Jean!"

"That is Grandmaster to you. Now get. Out." She pointed at the door. Murder written in her glare.

Diluc was... more than a little disconcerted. He had never seen Jean like this. All the same he stood his ground.

He crossed his arms over his chest in a bid to keep his hands from shaking- "Gladly. Once you tell me exactly where they are. *Grandmaster*."

The woman scoffed, "What makes you so certain I know?"

"You wouldn't have called me in to do your dirty work if you didn't."

Jean's eye twitched, "Oh I assure you Master Ragnvindr. I am more than capable of making and cleaning my own messes. Calling you in was a courtesy. One I shall never extend again."

Diluc worked his jaw, "Bullshit."

Jean scoffed, "What a waste of valuable time..." She stared at the door, "Be at the stables in an hour."

Diluc's face scrunched, "What?"

Jean glared, "We're going treasure hunting."

Diluc's expression flattened. And he decided that maybe the rock should yield to the hard place... in the best interests of Mondstadt- "Jean... I know I..." He sighed, "You can't get your hands dirty with this... You're the *Grandmaster*. You have to stay above this sort of-"

"He will need healing. We don't know what else they've done to him, and I will *not* risk-" She worked her jaw, "We're both going."

Diluc also worked his jaw, "Fine."

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Kaeya

Kaeya cradled his hand close as he curled tightly in the corner of the tent.

Every time he started to get a handle on his breathing the spot where his left ring finger used to be

would throb with the pulse of his heartbeat, or his stomach would roll with nausea, or one of his captors would kick him, or spit at him, or-

Kaeya tried to breathe evenly.

He tried to quell the whimpers that clawed at his throat.

And he tried desperately to keep the tears *in* his eyes and off his face.

He also tried his best not to panic, generally. About his situation, about the blackmail that the hoarders had managed to use to draw him out in the first place, and about the fact that his hand was very likely to get infected. (If it wasn't already.)

He'd been provided a dirty rag for wound care. Nothing else.

Not even water beyond the single cup he'd been given in the last two days. At this point, if they gave him more he didn't even think he'd spare it on an inadequate attempt at cleaning the ugly finger-stump.

He was too goddamn thirsty.

A figure knelt next to him.

Kaeya did his best to ignore him.

"Bet you regret sellin' us out... don't ya Mr. Cavalry Captain...?" Stefan grabbed him by the hair, forcing Kaeya to make eye contact, "Such a shame... We had a nice deal going-"

Kaeya grunted "D-Deal was off when you murdered that s-stablehand, Stefan..." His head pounded. Likely a combination of dehydration along with a severe concussion.

The Hoarder laughed, "That little snitch? Why d'you care about him anyways?"

There are limits to what I can shield you from... even if your intel is usually good.

Murder was generally a well-agreed-upon limit.

Kaeya glared up into green eyes and a yellow, toothy grin that exuded the level of confidence that only a very stupid man could feel.

Kaeya may die here, that was true- but there was no way out for Stefan and his crew after this fiasco. Barring leaving Mondstadt altogether (possibly). Which they did not have the resources to pull off- considering they'd both committed murder in broad daylight, then turned around and kidnapped, tortured, and tried to ransom a high-ranking officer. The knights were going to throw everything they had at this.

The man was simply too dumb to realize it.

Kaeya opted not to answer.

Stefan huffed, "Whatever. Not like you can fucking touch me anyway, Khaenri'ahn piece of shit."

Kaeya didn't know if he wanted to laugh or cry.

The channels were limited from which that knowledge could have spread.

Very limited.

And Stefan was a fucking moron, all things considered.

He probably didn't even know what Khaenri'ah *was*- let alone why the secret was so dangerous to Kaeya, personally.

The most obvious answer was the one that Kaeya refused to let himself consider.

Because surely a silly little argument over a pilfered bottle of wine wouldn't be grounds for... for all of this...?

Would it...?

Kaeya felt the tears start to threaten again. So he squeezed his eyes shut.

He didn't have the energy to catch his head as Stefan dropped him back into the dirt.

The hoarder huffed, "You're no fun when you keep passing out like this... I liked it better when you were screaming. Or bantering. Now it's just kind of pathetic..."

Kaeya focused on breathing in an attempt to not *actually* pass out.

Maybe... if you gave me some water, food, and medical care I'd be a little more entertaining...

"C'mon... Do something interesting..." The hoarder nudged him with a boot. He literally kicked his injured hand-

Kaeya yelped and curled tighter. The chains around his ankles and legs clinked.

Stefan chuckled- "Yeah- like that-"

Out of nowhere, an explosion rocked through the ground.

"What the-"

Shouts filled the air.

Tears finally fell in a combination of relief and fear.

Kaeya didn't even care who it was at this point, only that it was *someone*, even if that someone ended up killing him after all-

Stefan hauled Kaeya upright. Which was dizzying, and awful, and, and...

If Kaeya'd had anything in his stomach, he would have thrown it up-

"Keep fucking still-" Something sharp prodded his side as the man's arm wound around Kaeya's neck.

The tent flap didn't so much fly open as it was sliced open. And set on fire. By a burning claymore-

Blood, sweat, and grime were caked on Diluc's face as he stalked forward through the inferno.

Kaeya blinked.

Because he had to be hallucinating.

Diluc wouldn't *personally* show up to rescue him. Kaeya could see him *maybe* sending someone, but Diluc would never waste his *own* time to-

Unless he's here to kill me...

Kaeya wasn't certain whether or not the thought actually made sense. But he was operating on almost four days with no food, as many days with only a cup or two of water, and a bad concussion.

And probably blood loss.

No, *definitely* blood loss because they'd cut off his fucking finger-

"Let. Him. Go." Flames licked at the tent, at his brother's clothes, hair and fingertips-

Smoke filled the air.

"Another step and he dies." Stefan's voice shook, "I- I mean it-"

Kaeya groaned as the hoarder dragged him backward a step.

Diluc growled.

And a brawler burst into the tent behind his brother-

"L-Lu-"

Three things happened at once.

Kaeya shouted.

Diluc parried and countered what was, quite frankly, a *sloppy* excuse for an attack.

And Kaeya felt whatever wind was left inside him leave his body at once as a knife quite suddenly pierced his right side.

He was thrown to the ground. Like a rag doll.

Maybe it was four things, then.

Or perhaps five, if you included Stefan's mad dash out the back corner of the tent-

"KAEYA-"

Kaeya was certain he was hallucinating now. Because there was absolutely *no* way Diluc would sound that scared-

"JEAN I'VE GOT HIM BUT I NEED YOU-" Diluc- or Hallucination! Diluc's next shriek was desperate and raw.

And his hands were gentle as he carefully turned Kaeya onto his side.

Kaeya wheezed and choked in the meantime.

Because Stefan couldn't have done him the courtesy of missing his lung *or* leaving the knife in, of course.

Kaeya spasmed in the dirt as the hallucination of his brother did its best to hold him steady. He coughed out blood.

Maybe even his entire right lung.

Who could know, honestly?

“Hang in there- Just hang on, K-” Fingers brushed through his hair. Pressure on his side felt like hell incarnate-

Kaeya whimpered pathetically.

“Just a little longer, Kae- Jean’s gonna get you all fixed up in no time...” Tears tracked through dirt and soot on his brother’s face.

Kaeya wondered if hallucinations were always so vivid...

A gentle breeze distracted him from the thought.

And instead of passing out he... this time he felt like he was cradled gently into unconsciousness.

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# The Way You Shake and Shiver

## Chapter Summary

immediately after...

## Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

### *Shaking Hands - Panic Attack*

#### *Diluc*

“Keep steady pressure, Luc-” Jean sent out another healing burst- “That’s all I can do right now, we are *extremely* vulnerable here-”

Diluc cradled Kaeya’s head gently with one arm, and with the other held a rag (which probably used to be a blanket? He hadn’t been paying much attention when he grabbed for whatever was closest-) against his brother’s side.

Kaeya wasn’t wearing much... just the tattered remains of his undershirt. Diluc pulled the fabric gently away from the edges of the ugly knife wound, then realized that it didn’t matter much in the grand scheme of things when the fabric he was using to staunch the wound was just as gross. The cloth was filthy- caked in dirt, grime, and sweat. The wound was likely to get infected regardless without quick and thorough care.

And antibiotics. A lot of antibiotics.

Kaeya’s pants were also filthy. One pant leg was ripped off above the knee. Above a knee that was horribly bruised.

Horribly bruised and swollen.

His feet were bare save heavy manacles that clinked every time he moved even a little.

The sound set Diluc’s teeth on edge.

It was almost winter.

Kaeya shivered. His overshirt was nowhere to be found, let alone his coat and scarf.

Diluc knew that Kaeya didn’t like the cold on a good day- despite what he tried to claim. And today was nowhere near a good day.

The past week and a half- when Diluc had first realized that something was *very* wrong, when Diluc had realized that his little brother was long overdue to show up and nag him about... anything, really- was a seemingly endless series of very not good days.

Diluc would consider them very bad days.

Then horrible days. When the first ransom note turned up. And Diluc was left with nothing to go on as the knights scrambled with the less than helpful clue.

Left with nothing but his thoughts, centered around the terrible argument that had been his last conversation with his little brother before...

Diluc didn't even remember what he'd been mad about this time.

Which made everything feel that much worse.

Just another instance of Diluc hiding guilt behind anger and irritation. And it had almost been his last interaction with his brother.

Anger. Because Diluc was too much of a coward to admit how terrible he felt. Because Diluc was too stubborn to admit both forgiveness and guilt, and that he loved Kaeya- that Kaeya was his little brother and always would be, and that Diluc never truly believed him to be a threat-

Kaeya groaned weakly, but both his eyes remained tightly shut. Both eyes- his scars clearly visible.

Diluc had... never actually seen them... Not fully healed, at any rate- the photograph didn't really count. And it hadn't really prepared him-

*Don't think about that right now-*

Sweat beaded across Kaeya's brow, and his breathing remained shallow.

Shallow and punctuated with wet, choking coughs. Bloody coughs- a vestige of the now (mostly) healed wound, as leftover blood still choked his little brother's lungs-

"Luc?" Jean's hand on his shoulder, "Can you do that for me?"

*Do what...? Was she talking...?*

Diluc blinked. He was startled as something dripped down his cheeks. As his vision wobbled as if wet. As if he were crying- "What...?"

"I said- I need you to guard him. The camp isn't clear-" Jean's gaze kept moving to the half-charred front of the tent- "Most who aren't unconscious have fled, but I want to make certain we aren't about to get ambushed before I do more in-depth healing." She'd never even put her sword down.

Unlike Diluc, who had tossed his own aside haphazardly as if it never even had an important purpose to begin with. His back was even turned to the opening.

Or... the main opening.

The Treasure Hoarder who'd tried to murder his brother had cut another through the side of the tent.

So they truly were as exposed as they could get-

"I am going to clear the camp, then restrain the few we knocked out, okay Luc?" Jean's hand squeezed his shoulder, "Then we'll properly assess his injuries."

Diluc nodded somewhat numbly, and Jean stood quickly.

A minute or so passed. There was very little sound now. Just Kaeya's shallow, pained breaths, and Jean moving around, handcuffing those who couldn't flee, and making certain none had stayed who would strike back.

It would be incredibly stupid of them, considering more knights were already on their way. Less than two minutes out- assuming Jean's initial plan had been set in motion properly.

It felt like an eternity to Diluc.

They'd decided an ambush- just him and Jean- was the safest option to get to Kaeya before the Treasure Hoarders did something drastic.

Kaeya coughed, then wheezed again, and Diluc held him a little tighter.

Fat lot of good it did in the end...

In the back of his mind, Diluc heard the sound of Kaeya's breath leaving him all at once, saw the look of fear, and surprise, and *pain* etched across his little brother's features as it played on some sort of torturous mental loop.

Diluc pulled Kaeya a little more off the ground and toward his lap-

Kaeya whimpered, and his eyelids fluttered. He tried to fidget, reaching a weak hand up-

"Shh... Don't move. Jean only healed the very worst of it," Diluc adjusted his brother slowly and carefully into what he hoped was a more comfortable position.

He got his face completely off the ground, at any rate, and with Kaeya's head pillowed more fully on his lap he no longer had to support his head with his arm. Which allowed him to wipe away some of the blood and sweat from his brother's face. There was also a concerning amount on the side of his head- near his right temple- that matted the hair. Diluc hadn't noticed it at first, given how pale, and dirty, and beaten Kaeya had been in general on first inspection. With a fatal-if-not-immediately-treated stab wound thrown in for good measure-

Diluc tried to force his thoughts to stop spiraling. Tried to force his voice to sound at least somewhat soft, and ideally comforting, "You're going to be just fine, K. Just hang in there."

Eyes half-lidded danced- "L-Lu...?" Blood bubbled as Kaeya choked on the words.

"Shh..." Diluc felt his voice shake, but he hoped it came out at least somewhat steady, "Stop trying to talk. The knife pierced your lung-"

Kaeya's body stiffened in a spasm of some sort- his entire face scrunched, before it morphed into a coughing fit- then a full retch-

Diluc's hands shook as he did his best to hold his baby brother steady. As he held him on his side, and made certain to keep both his face and hair out of the bloody vomit, and to keep constant pressure on what was still a seeping wound in his side.

It wasn't good that he was vomiting.

The worst of the knife wound was only barely healed-

"I'm back- I'm here-" Jean was in front of them, suddenly, pushing Kaeya's bangs back gently from his face, "I'm sorry Kaeya, I'm back, it's alright-"

The breeze picked up around them- gentle and soothing. Jean pulled a knife from her belt and began gently cutting away the remnants of Kaeya's ruined shirt.

She whispered soft nonsense words of comfort as she worked, and Diluc took the hint and did his best to offer as much comfort as he could as well. He alternated between rubbing Kaeya's back, and running gentle fingers through his hair. Kaeya always liked having his hair played with...

Finally, with full access to the nasty wound, Jean held the edges of the gash together. The wind kicked up even further as Kaeya cried out.

And the horrible gash in his side finally knitted completely closed.

A moment of peace passed. Then was abruptly shattered as Kaeya stiffened in Diluc's arms.

Jean helped hold him steady, as once again, Kaeya retched out a bloody mess. The knife had apparently pierced more than just his lung-

"J-Jean-" Diluc felt his hands shake along with his voice-

"It's alright," Jean made up for the unsteadiness in both tone and literal physical support- "It's healing. Everything's alright... Just gotta get it out, yeah?"

Comfort. For both Diluc- who had no idea what was going on internally and was therefore starting to panic- and for Kaeya, who was suddenly much more present and very obviously miserable as his body attempted to expel the blood and viscera that had leaked into the wrong places-

Kaeya cried- in obvious pain and discomfort.

And who wouldn't, really?

Diluc also cried, as for the second time in his life he held a dying family member in his arms-

A hand cupped his cheek- "Breathe. You need to calm down-"

Jean could have been talking to either of them at this point.

Kaeya was shaking in his arms, trembling, really, with his eyes once again squeezed tightly shut.

Jean helped pull him upright, into an almost sitting position- leaning heavily against Diluc.

To his credit, Diluc did his best to support his brother, to hold him steady and secure as he continued to shiver.

Jean pulled her coat off of her own shoulders and tucked it in around Kaeya's, "Diluc, he's cold, can you-?"

*Right- Yes-*

Diluc kicked himself that he hadn't been already-

Jean hadn't even finished her request before Diluc started raising his own body temperature.

Kaeya finally relaxed against him barely a moment later.

He was obviously unconscious. Or... probably unconscious, as he tucked his face into Diluc's neck- instinctively seeking warmth.

Jean sat close as well as she tucked a loose strand of hair behind her captain's ear, "Just a few minutes... A few minutes and we'll get you tucked into a cart and on the way to the Cathedral..." Another healing burst, as Jean also found the head wound that Diluc had discovered earlier.

Kaeya kind of... huffed, so he was perhaps somewhat awake.

Despite being obviously cold, Kaeya's forehead felt hot against Diluc's skin.

Diluc kept his voice low, "Jean... I think he's feverish..."

Jean nodded as she continued running gentle fingers through Kaeya's hair, though she pointedly avoided the worst of the matted blood, "I know..."

Diluc fought panic, "You know- what do you know-"

Kaeya fidgeted, and Diluc bit back his words.

"His hand is badly infected, Diluc. Stay calm- we will treat it at the Cathedral." Jean's voice, meanwhile, remained soft and steady.

Diluc hummed. And finally noticed the bloody mess of a rag tucked around Kaeya's hand, as even unconscious, Kaeya held it close in a pathetic attempt at protecting it.

Rage boiled in Diluc's gut alongside the fear.

And finally, *finally* the clip-clop of hoof-beats announced the arrival of more knights.

Jean sighed and stood, "I'm going to work on getting the manacles off... I saw a key nearby..."

Diluc grunted in response and held his brother tight.

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Chapter End Notes

I might actually have the next chapter ready for tomorrow, surprisingly enough.
(MIGHT being the key word lol)

But I think the one after that actually fits better on a different prompt day than what originally thought, so it might actually get shoved to the 14th.
meh, we'll see, I'm playing fast and loose with this whole whumptober thing haha

Everything Hurts and I'm Dying

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

Stomach Pain - Head Trauma - Back from the Dead

Kaeya

Brief moments of semi-consciousness brought nothing but misery.

Well- mostly misery.

The way Diluc's arms would tighten around him, and Jean's voice and hands would gently chase away the worst edges of the pain every time Kaeya... sort of woke up... made it... a little less miserable.

Kaeya still wasn't certain what was real, what was hallucination, and what was... the growing possibility that he'd actually died and was stuck in some sort of half-miserable, half-not-so-bad purgatory.

He was jostled a small fraction against his will, and Kaeya was fairly certain he made some sort of pathetic whimpering noise as dizziness mixed with pain to become a disorienting cacophony-

Okay, so half wasn't accurate.

It was definitely closer to 60-40 misery to not-so-badness, but-

The ground felt like it dropped out from under him very suddenly, and Kaeya reassessed the situation to 80-20. Which was still way too generous-

"Slower, Luc-"

"I'm sorry- I- I'm sorry-"

The movement stopped, and Kaeya's head was tucked a little closer toward his brother's neck.

He groaned again as Diluc lifted once more- slower this time.

"Steady, K... We've got you. You're alright."

Kaeya was having trouble believing that there was even a remote possibility that Diluc could be talking to him in such a gentle and caring tone of voice.

But he was miserable. In every sense of the word. His head ached and throbbed, his stomach hurt, and his hand felt like it was on fire and being squeezed in a vice- both at the same time. He was vacillating wildly between feeling scorching hot, and freezing cold, and he didn't have the energy or the emotional capacity to do anything but accept comfort from the only family he had left in this world.

His knee didn't feel all that great either, actually-

The measure was brought back to 60-40 as Diluc used his vision to generate warmth. Even the movement was slightly more tolerable as his brother carried him... somewhere.

Stairs? Or a step up at least...?

Kaeya floated, finally warm, as someone held him close.

Voices also floated, trivial and unimportant.

More movement.

A cool hand on his forehead.

A breeze.

“Come on, Kaeya,” Familiar voice.

Jean...?

“Stay with us. Stay awake for a minute...”

No.

The arms around him shifted, and something like a blanket was wrapped around him. It was a little coarse, but it brought a strong sense of comfort.

“Should we set him between us? We can try to counteract some of the jostling once we get moving...”

Diluc...?

His brother sounded... weirdly unsure of himself.

“I agree... Here, lean him against me while you get situated, Luc-”

A different arm wound its way behind Kaeya’s shoulders and pulled him away from the warmth.

The loss felt tragic.

“Shh... Kaeya, relax. Diluc is right here, he’s not going anywhere, we’re just trying to get comfortable before the cart starts moving. Okay?”

Cart...?

Another light breeze picked up to accompany Jean’s palm against his forehead.

It felt really nice...

Kaeya relaxed against her as clarity slowly filtered back in.

“There you are... Stay awake for a minute, Kaeya. You need to drink something before we get moving,” Jean’s voice was soft and encouraging as she tilted him upright.

Kaeya groaned as pain radiated through his side.

Then he winced as Diluc’s voice cut through his misery- also weirdly soft and encouraging-
“Here...”

Kaeya cracked an eye open to see Diluc kneeling right in front of him, opening up a canteen- “I’ll hold it for you, but Jean’s right, you have to drink.”

“S’it poisoned...?”

Wow. Talking sucks.

Telling the stupid joke led directly into a painful coughing fit.

And to an... extremely aggrieved expression on his brother’s face-

“I- Why do you think it would be poisoned...?”

B-Because you wish I was dead...?

Cain instinct, or-

Kaeya realized the joke really wasn’t funny. It hit too close to home for starters, and secondly...

Kaeya couldn’t think of a second reason.

His head kind of lolled to the side onto Jean’s shoulder, and his eyes started to close against both his intention and will.

Jean pulled the canteen out of Diluc’s hands, and then it was at Kaeya’s lips-

He startled a bit, disoriented. Then he shivered.

Diluc moved close and pulled the blanket back up around his... bare shoulders...

Right...

Nausea rolled as thoughts moved and writhed through his fever-laden brain-

Am I still wearing pants...?

I hope I’m still wearing pants-

Jean forced him somewhat upright, “Drink, please, Kaeya you’re horribly dehydrated. We can do an IV once we get to the Cathedral but if you can get something down now it will be much better...”

Kaeya drank.

It wasn’t like he was fighting it on purpose.

The water sat strangely in his stomach, but overall the liquid felt like some sort of divine gift. He whimpered pathetically as Jean pulled it away-

“I know, I’m sorry... But you need to go slow. Little sips, Kae...”

“T-Tired...” His mouth tasted like iron again, as once more talking led to coughing.

A hand rubbed his back. It felt really nice. The warmth of pyro felt even nicer-

Kaeya sort of... leaned toward it on impulse.

Which led to an alarmed inhale from his brother, and a little bit of a scramble from Jean to catch him as he started to flop over like a dead fish-

“Stars above, Kaeya-”

“It’s alright...” Diluc guided him gently to lay with his head in his lap, “It’s probably better if he lays down anyway.”

The blanket was once again tucked securely around him, and Diluc’s hand rubbed pyro-warmed circles into his back.

“Alright, that’s fine,” Jean blew out a heavy sigh, “Though I was hoping to get more water in him, he’s severely...”

And Kaeya was out completely before Jean finished her sentence.

~~~~~

### ***Diluc***

Diluc rubbed what he hoped were comforting circles into his brother’s back.

Kaeya looked and felt so small, so frail and thin in his arms. His cheeks were sallow, and the general ashen pallor to the man’s skin made his scars stand out even more prominently than before.

Scars.

Scars that Diluc himself had inflicted on a horrible rain-soaked night as he lost control of his vision for the first time since he was a literal *child*.

Grief had choked out all rational thought. And rage had left him burning as he tried to process one unexpected betrayal after another.

And then it left *Kaeya* burning- literally- and any chance of life ever being what it once was vanished completely alongside an explosion of ice and frost-

Diluc stiffened as a *very* important thought occurred to him- “Jean-”

Kaeya fidgeted on his lap, either from the unexpected movement, or the alarm in Diluc’s tone, he couldn’t know for sure.

It was likely a combination of the two, honestly.

Jean reached over and smoothed Kaeya’s hair until he settled, “Quiet, Luc. He finally fell asleep-”

“Jean, his *vision*- did he have his vision on him when-”

Jean’s eyes widened. Which was all the answer he needed.

Diluc’s teeth ground as he worked his jaw, “Stop the cart.” Diluc was already sitting his brother up as gently as he could manage.

Kaeya groaned with the movement, then he yelped as the wagon rolled over a rough patch-

Jean quickly scooted close to support him, then turned toward the driver’s seat- “Swan- You heard him, stop the cart!” She kept her voice somewhat low, even as her tone carried urgent authority-

Diluc was jumping over the back edge of the vehicle before it had even stopped rolling-

“Luc, wait-” Concerned blue eyes studied him. Jean frowned as she readjusted Kaeya to lay on her own lap.

Diluc glared, impatient.

“Just...” Jean sighed, her expression pained, “Be careful... please...”

Diluc nodded. He let his gaze linger on Kaeya, who was once again unconscious- this time on Jean’s lap. He worked his jaw.

He *hated* leaving him like this...

But Kaeya didn’t need him right now for comfort. Hell, Kaeya probably wouldn’t *want* him around in terms of comfort, were he a little more aware of himself.

Their relationship wasn’t exactly loving anymore...

No, Kaeya didn’t need Diluc's presence.

Kaeya needed his *vision*. And that was something that Diluc could certainly do something about.

He turned back toward the trail. Toward the camp.

Then he activated his elemental sight as he took off at a jog.

~~~~~

Chapter End Notes

Diluc's going treasure hunting :D

Hmmm I wonder where Kaeya's vision wound up

I think I'm aiming for the prompt of the 14th for the next chapter. It might not get posted on that day, but I'll do my best!

Die a Hero or Live Long Enough to Become a Villain

Chapter Summary

Murder. Murder is committed.

This chapter is legitimately quite brutal, this is your warning!

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

-Desperate Measures-

Diluc

Diluc marched with purpose back into the ruined camp.

A cacophony of colors assaulted his senses as he forced himself to maintain elemental sight for much longer bursts than he was used to. He could feel the beginnings of a headache forming behind his eyes.

It was inconvenient and uncomfortable- but hardly any sort of effective deterrent.

Diluc pointedly ignored the Treasure Hoarders off to the side- handcuffed and being both tended to and monitored by a couple of knights. There was a cart nearby, ready and waiting to take those they'd captured back to what Diluc hoped were cold, dank, and horribly uncomfortable prison cells-

Focus.

Tendrils of various elements filtered and floated around him.

Pyro- both his own and the work of potioners- was the most evident. Which made sense given the excessive scorch marks all around the grove.

He kept searching, trying to mentally tease out any hint of cryo.

He got a hint of electro, and there was Jean's anemo-

There.

Diluc made a beeline toward where they'd been keeping Kaeya. *Obviously* that should have been the first place he searched.

Diluc mentally kicked himself and resolved to be sharper moving forward. He shook his head for good measure- he needed to get his shit together-

A knight put a hand on his chest in an attempt to slow his progress- rambling on- something about an active crime scene-

Diluc shouldered right past her.

A second approached, and Diluc legitimately growled-

A familiar, though unexpected figure pulled the knight back by the shoulder.

Diluc blinked. He wasn't certain he'd ever seen the alchemist anywhere that wasn't his lab, or Dragonspine-

Investigative Captain, dumbass. This is literally part of his job description.

"Master Diluc. May I ask what you are doing here?" Albedo's head tilted, almost in curiosity, though his tone and expression remained inscrutable- "I was told you were accompanying Grandmaster Jean back to the city-"

Diluc decided to get straight to the point. Before the man even finished talking- "Kaeya's vision. He doesn't have it, and I am assuming it was on him when..." The rest of the statement got stuck. Somewhere between disbelieving (even still) of the current circumstances, and a burning, unbridled rage- "When they took him."

Albedo blinked, clearly thinking for a moment, "I see. We have not seen it, but we also have not been looking specifically for it. I will assist you."

Diluc grunted. Then he stomped toward the tent. He didn't really care one way or another if the alchemist followed.

He shoved aside the charred remains of the tent flap, and once again activated elemental sight.

There was an imprint of energy on the ground. An imprint that could only be formed when someone, or something with an elemental signature did not move very much for quite an extended period.

A hand landed on his shoulder, and Diluc jumped-

"I can search this area, if you'd like, Master Diluc. I also have elemental sight and am known to be quite thorough in my work-"

"We'll both search." Diluc tore his gaze away from the blood stains that mingled with his brother's cryo. The energy floated around the area like a haze. He turned and started tearing through a nearby trunk.

Albedo hummed, and did the same with a crate on the other side of the tent, "Smart choice, two sets of eyes will expedite and increase our odds of success."

Diluc grunted. Then he turned to the next bin.

—

Diluc glared down at the potion bottles in front of him. He'd sensed a strong cryo energy and grown excited, only to be sorely disappointed... again.

Albedo hummed behind him, "Yes... The alchemical energies are making the search quite difficult, aren't they-" The man jumped as Diluc grabbed a bottle and launched it at a nearby tree with a frustrated shout.

He felt kind of bad for the now-frozen tree...

But he didn't really regret the outburst because it did make him feel a bit better.

He reached for the next bottle, ignoring the wide-eyed stares from nearby knights who were still busy cataloging and organizing stolen goods-

Albedo grabbed his arm before he could chuck the next cryo-molotov-

“Master Diluc, I must insist you stop-”

Diluc gasped as he yanked his arm away. He took a step to the side with a growled- “Don’t *touch* me-!”

Albedo raised his hands and also took a pointed step back, “Apologies, Master Diluc... But you need to stop- you are only further muddling any potential trail...” Albedo’s brow was drawn in concern, and something that looked *way* too much like pity- “Why don’t you sit down, have a break, and I will search the rest of the camp... how does that sound?”

Diluc stared at the man. His expression faltered- he could literally feel it-

Stupid fucking temperamental child-

*What the **fuck** is wrong with me?!*

Suddenly, Albedo was gently pulling the cryo-potion out of his hand.

Diluc let him. He’d done enough damage. Made enough of an ass of himself for one day-

Diluc also let him lead him to sit on a log.

Then Diluc sat quietly as the alchemist cracked open a canteen and handed it to him.

“Drink some water, relax, get your bearings.”

Diluc took a swig, then handed it back. Then he settled with his elbows on his knees and stared down at the ground. He stared down at the ground, and fought desperately to get his breathing under control, because as much as he didn’t want to admit it he was kind of freaking out-

Albedo’s hand squeezed his shoulder, “Breathe, it’s alright. I will keep looking-”

“I’m sorry.” Tears fell. Diluc hated them.

Diluc hated himself.

“Please do not apologize, Master Diluc. This is a difficult situation. In all honesty I do not believe you should even be personally involved at all.”

Diluc grunted. As usual.

Albedo knelt in front of him, “Perhaps you should head to the Cathedral? I am sure Kaeya will appreciate your presence during healing,” Albedo’s head tilted again, “He does not like to be alone, especially with doctors, and I... have to be here...” A tinge of regret tinted the words.

Diluc almost thought to question it, but he was too busy being swallowed by his own self-loathing. Because he was fairly certain his brother would prefer the company of doctors to him-

Albedo sighed, “Alright... Just... relax for a bit...” He stood and made his way back into the tent they’d been searching.

It was the fourth, and the second to last.

And Diluc could sense no elemental traces of cryo coming from the final tent...

He scrubbed his hands across his face roughly, angrily.

Then he stood and activated elemental sight.

Nothing new greeted him, so he pushed the vision even further- past trees, past rocks, past the point of a near-splitting headache, until-

He sucked in a sharp breath and turned more fully toward the faintest of wisps-

He moved with purpose toward a set of footprints out among the trees.

Footprints, above which hovered a barely-detectable trace of cryo.

So some bastard fucking took it...

They probably planned to ransom the vision itself- the fucking barbarians-

Diluc drew his claymore and stalked into the forest.

He had the trail now.

At the end of it he *would* find his brother's vision.

And if the rat bastards who took it had even a modicum of sense they would drop it and it would be all he'd find.

~~~~~

The vision wasn't the only thing Diluc found.

In fact, if he hadn't been following the elemental traces, he likely wouldn't have found their makeshift camp at all.

Shadows had long since stretched into night as Diluc stomped through the forest, then into the Stormbearer Mountains- his eyes ached with the near-constant overuse of elemental sight.

Then, other elements bloomed across his vision.

Electro and pyro- strong and concentrated-

*Potioneers...*

Then voices filtered in alongside the color.

"What the fuck do we do now-" Desperate.

"Shit, Stef, they got my brother-" Panicked.

"Shut the fuck up Don- I'm thinking-" Stupid.

Diluc turned the corner around a boulder, and he could now make out five, maybe six figures all huddled around a single lantern.

Rage boiled in his gut. It mixed with his pounding headache to form a misery that wanted nothing more than to inflict more misery on someone else-

One more time, Diluc activated his elemental sight.

There was only one cryo signature.

And it was on the man who'd stabbed his brother.

In another life, perhaps Diluc would have been more well-adjusted.

Would have gotten help, and maybe processed the trauma and grief that led to undiagnosed and untreated PTSD and depression and anxiety and probably also an emotional disorder centered around uncontrolled anger.

But in this life, Diluc let that anger fuel him. Which meant he wasn't thinking all that clearly when he marched straight into the makeshift camp-

Half a dozen figures all scrambled to their feet at once.

One man screamed in surprise, and maybe in fear as Diluc made a beeline straight for one figure in particular-

A knife slashed toward his face, and Diluc parried it easily, then sliced upward with his claymore.

He didn't watch. He wasn't careful.

He had a target and a mission and no sympathy or fucks left to give-

Someone screamed.

Diluc found the sound somewhat satisfying.

The vision thief scrambled backwards and tried to run into the treeline.

*Fucking COWARD-*

Diluc *shrieked* as he summoned a bird on pure impulse. There was absolutely no thought behind it, only anger, and fear, and a single, solitary goal-

—

The overload reaction shouldn't have been surprising.

Diluc had seen the electro. He *knew* there was an electro potioneer present.

He supposed he hadn't really expected the man to be outright suicidal, and to throw an electro bomb *while* Diluc was summoning enough hellfire to put a pyro regisvine to shame.

Especially considering Diluc hadn't even been aiming for the man. His target was in the opposite direction-

Diluc groaned as consciousness seemed determined to flit in and out of reach. Then he spasmed as residual electro danced through his nerve-endings-

When his eyes finally cracked open, he saw that he was not the only unfortunate soul to get fried.



But unlike the others, he was the only one wearing pyro resistant clothing- on top of being naturally resistant to his own element.

One of them, a man, was definitely dead. The other was wheezing, and half of her torso was covered in both pyro and electro burns-

“FUCKING BASTARD-”

Diluc forced himself up onto his hands and knees, just in time to take a hard kick to the ribs-

He groaned as he collapsed once more to the ground. His sword was *just* out of reach.

All the same, he grabbed the boot easily as it reeled back for another cheapshot-

His assailant hollered as he landed hard on his back-

And Diluc wasted no time scrambling on top of him and wrapping his hands around the man’s throat-

Elemental sight.

Nothing.

Diluc frantically scanned the trees-

Pyro.

Pyro pyro pyro nothing BUT PYRO-

He turned back to the man- “WHERE *IS* IT?!”

The Hoarder choked as Diluc instinctively squeezed-

He forced himself to loosen his grip- “WHERE IS MY BROTHER’S VISION?!”

Diluc’s hair stuck to his face. Along with sweat, grime, and blood.

And now soot as the forest around them burned-

He felt, and he was certain he looked, a vision of pure demonic rage-

“Y-Y’brother-?” The man beneath him looked nothing but confused as his hands scrabbled uselessly against Diluc’s.

The question made sparks of fury dance along Diluc’s arms, around his eyes as he grew ever more angry-

His prisoner yelped.

Diluc steeled his tone- “I will assume...” It took everything he had to growl rather than shriek, “That you are simply stupid. Cavalry Captain Kaeya’s vision. Where is it?”

“C- The Captain has a brother-?”

***That’s what you choose to focus on?!***

Diluc growled, and the lad choked once more as his grip tightened-

“S-Stefan took it- S-Stefan had it-” Diluc’s grip loosened enough so that he could speak properly- “He liked to tease him with it- liked to toss it around- I thought it was kind of cruel the way the Captain would get confused or- or get physically ill whenever he took it or tried to damage it but he would never listen to me I’m just a runner please I just do errands I don’t know anything else I just needed money for-”

Diluc grunted. Then he shoved the boy back into the dirt before standing.

Elemental sight.

He’d calmed down a fraction...

And while he couldn’t sense cryo, per se (not surprising given the inferno around him), he could just barely sense where broken brambles and bushes created a path for a fleeing creature.

He scooped up his sword and followed at a sprint.

It wasn’t long before he overtook the man.

Diluc tackled the limping, hobbling figure to the ground.

The man screamed, and lashed out with a knife.

The same knife that-

It caught Diluc in the forearm, but he managed to protect his face, so that was good-

Diluc shouted as he fought to disarm the Hoarder-

A boot nailed him square in the solar plexus, and Diluc wheezed-

The man, Stefan, if the fact that Diluc could now see the traces of Kaeya’s vision floating all around him was any indication, lashed out once more-

Diluc dodged to the side and rolled, lifting his sword.

He really should have just cut the man down right at the start.

Tackling him had been rather stupid. And it cost him a nasty gash in his arm-

Diluc prepared to lunge, when his target stepped away- toward the edge of the treeline- toward a cliff-

He dug frantically through a pouch, then pulled out-

“I’ll fucking drop it! I swear I will!”

Diluc froze.

He wasn’t certain what it took to shatter a vision. He’d never seen one break, nor had he ever met someone who had.

But a drop from this height certainly wouldn’t be good for it...

Nor would it be easy to find.

The vision flashed somewhat weakly. Its light was dim and inconsistent, and the setting was

scratched and bent in multiple places.

Which Diluc could see even from nearly five feet away.

*You really did try to-*

Flames licked at Diluc's arms, and he could feel the air pressure change as heat built around him.

His hair danced around his head and face like flames in the ensuing currents.

“Don't fucking COME NEAR ME!” Stefan scrambled further away, closer to the edge.

And Diluc let his demons loose.

He sprinted forward, a raging inferno both literally and metaphorically, and grabbed the man by the shirt before he could even react-

He also grabbed the wrist holding the vision.

The flesh of his arm bubbled and burned on contact, and Stefan *screamed-*

It wasn't... intentional, per se...

But Diluc would be lying, should he claim to be displeased with the pain he was inflicting. The pain he was finally repaying in kind to the man who had *tortured his brother-*

Kaeya's vision dropped safely into the grass beside them- dim, but still alight with life.

Stefan continued to wail in misery as Diluc held him over the edge, as Diluc's flames licked and burned the man's flesh-

“What is stopping me...” Diluc glared. He didn't blink, “From ending you right here and now...?”

Stefan whimpered as the heat subsided somewhat- “I- Wh- What do you want? Money? Goods? You obviously don't care about the vision so why are you here-?”

*Don't care about the-?*

Diluc blinked.

He supposed... from an outside perspective... he really did risk the vision without even a second thought...

He growled.

“I- I- I-” Stefan sputtered as Diluc held him closer to the edge- “Intel! I have intel! Good stuff- The Captain always came to me for it-”

Heat spiked once more with his anger- “So why betray him.” The question didn't have the proper inflection of a question.

“*He* betrayed *us*! He sold us out! I don't know why you care so much he can't be trusted anyway-”

Diluc's grip tightened as his irritation spiked.

*How do **none** of you realize we're related?!?*

“He’s a fucking spy!” Stefan’s voice took on a desperate edge as his hands clung to Diluc’s. As his toes clung for purchase on the edge of the cliff, “He’s a fucking Khaenri’ahn spy who’s going to throw us all to the Abyss anyway so why the fuck does a Knight like you care?!?”

Diluc’s eyes widened as he froze.

“What.”

“I said what I said and it’s true! I lured him out with the threat of coming forward with the information and he came like a fly to rotten meat so what does that say?!?”

Diluc stared. He forced himself to breathe, “Where did you hear this.”

“Let me go and I’ll tell.” The negotiation ended very quickly as Diluc shook the man, then held him even further toward the edge- “I DON’T KNOW WE MET AT NIGHT-”

“WHO?!?”

“I don’t know!” Stefan wailed, “I didn’t even see him, he had a mask on, please!”

Diluc gritted his teeth, “Who else knows.”

“What?”

“WHO ELSE KNOWS?!?”

“No one! Just me and Jess, but that fucking Grandmaster bitch killed her-”

Diluc let the man go.

He watched. To be certain.

Numbness crept in along every edge. Numbness, then nausea with the sickening -*crack!*- that followed...

His anger was replaced with a cold, seeping nothing as he stared down at the lifeless body-

Diluc turned away. He picked up his brother’s vision, and cradled it gently in his hands- held it close and secure to his chest. Then he stumbled to a nearby boulder, collapsed to his knees, and threw up.

~~~~~

Chapter End Notes

Next day for *this* fic is the 19th

but I think I have maybe 2 other whumptober one shots in between? I think?
I don't remember lol

Enough is Enough

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

-Repeatedly Passing Out - Head Lolling-

Kaeya

Kaeya shivered.

Every shake and bump felt as though it were sending shockwaves through him- turning dull aches into sharp, biting pain.

Every now and then a breeze would tickle his cheeks, and the pain would abate. But then he would be left shivering even harder as it also chased away warmth.

A hand rubbed his back, and Kaeya kept hoping for heat, for his brother to just use his vision already, like he was before, but the only relief that came was in the form of a breeze.

A blessing and a curse.

A little more time passed, and another blanket, or coat, or *something* was tucked around him, and the hand rubbed more vigorous circles into his back.

“Shh... I’m sorry... We’re almost there, I promise,” Jean tucked a strand of hair behind his ear. Which was very sweet- it almost made him feel a little bit better- “Once we’re inside you’ll be nice and warm, I promise.”

Kaeya fidgeted. Which was a mistake. It wasn’t bad enough that the cart was jostling him all around, he had to go and add to the misery his own damn self-

I am very good at that... actually...

Another burst of healing, and Kaeya cracked his eyes open, “S’Diluu...”

“Shh... Relax, Kae...”

No.

Where is-

He was here-

I know he was here-

Wasn’t he...?

Kaeya’s heart rate picked up. His mouth felt suddenly even drier than was warranted by the severe dehydration-

“J-Jean-” Talking turned into coughing. As he should have expected by this point.

His vision swam, and he had to close his eyes again as nausea rolled through his stomach, and his

head felt suddenly pressurized.

He groaned.

Jean's fingers carded gently through his hair, "I've got you Kaeya... You're okay..."

He felt tears track down his face.

Because while he'd been fairly certain he was hallucinating at the time, finding out he really was as insane as he thought was much more of a gut-punch than he'd been expecting.

Especially considering his subconscious mind had decided to hit him where he hurt most- by dangling hope in front of him that the last of his family maybe possibly didn't hate him as much as he thought.

Jean shushed him gently as he cried, "I know... it's okay..."

You don't know-

You don't know at all-

Everything was noise and color and pain and pressure and-

Jean held his head gently, yet securely as they went over a rough spot. The sound of the wheels even changed- became more high in pitch, and the hoofbeats became louder- more staccato, almost. It felt like a conspiracy from the universe to drive metaphorical nails into Kaeya's skull-

Jean's thumb rubbed his temple gently, "We're gonna get you inside in just a minute. Get you warmed up, with some painkillers and antibiotics, and I'm sure Diluc will be back in no time with your vision, okay?"

Kaeya's brain felt sluggish as he blinked up at his grandmaster through pain and sheer, numbing disorientation.

Vision...?

"I don't have..."

I don't have a vision...

Do I...?

Maybe I do...

"Shh..." Jean's thumb rubbed another circle into his temple, "You do... and Diluc went to fetch it for you, remember?"

No...

Kaeya whimpered. He wasn't sure how to process...

"H-He's here..." Kaeya shivered.

Jean rubbed his forehead, and another gentle breeze brought both cold and a slight relief to the splitting headache, "Mhm, he was here, Kaeya... and he'll be back again soon, okay?"

The cart lurched to a stop somewhat suddenly.

Kaeya caught the grimace on Jean's face right before he himself squeezed his eyes shut with a groan-

Jean did her best to steady him, but still Kaeya felt like his stomach was in his feet, and his head was left somewhere on the pavement getting trampled by the horses-

Kaeya also felt like he was underwater as voices danced around him.

Then his body finally decided to have mercy on him, and he blacked out completely as hands started to lift him.

The last sensation he felt was Jean's hands steadying his head as his neck lost structural integrity.

~~~~~

"Nobody's coming for you."

Kaeya didn't respond. He just lay where he'd been dropped and tried to focus on his breathing-

"Hey! I'm fucking talking to you, mongrel-" An angry hand gripped his hair and yanked-

Kaeya yelped.

"Should I break your other knee then? Huh?" The man released his hair in favor of grabbing the manacles on his wrists. He dragged him partially upright. Then the man knelt. He didn't have a face. He put his hand on Kaeya's injured knee and pressed down- hard.

Kaeya screamed.

Then the man threw him back down into the dirt, and stood, "Fucking piece of shit-" He pulled his boot back over Kaeya's other leg, and Kaeya rolled to the side, out of the way-

The movement was horrible- both for his head *and* his leg.

The Treasure Hoarder was obviously displeased. If his angry grunt was any indication.

The man quickly grabbed Kaeya by the shoulders, yanking him back to face him again-

His surroundings spun, and suddenly Kaeya was no longer in the camp. His whole body still ached something fierce, though...

"You have been *nothing* but trouble ever since you came here!"

*When...? In general or just today...?*

Kaeya considered asking the snarky question, but the words got lodged in his throat as his brother continued to scream at him.

Diluc had even dragged him back into the storage room from which Kaeya was trying to sneak. He apparently didn't want to put on a show for his customers-

"What the *fuck* is your problem, Kaeya?! It's not enough that you constantly show up-"

A crack, as Kaeya's head slammed backward into the ground-

Ow...

“Fucking *stealing* from me-”

Numbing, screaming, *agony* as his leg was yanked straight-

*Wait- y-you’re actually hurting me-*

*Diluc you’re hurting me-*

Panic.

Hands on his arms- hands on his legs- hands on his forehead and Kaeya suddenly couldn’t really move and he was really dizzy, and-

“I want you *GONE!* Don’t you get that?!” That vein of anger between Diluc’s eyebrows bulged as he squeezed Kaeya’s arms hard enough to hurt-

The slam of the door as Kaeya was shoved out the back of the Angel’s Share. Out into the rain. Drunk off his ass.

His surroundings spun.

*N-No wonder m’so dizzy...*

Kaeya couldn’t remember drinking... couldn’t remember much of anything really...

He stumbled. Then took a swig from the stolen bottle that Diluc hadn’t actually bothered to take back from him.

His right leg buckled underneath him, and he fell hard-

He tried to catch himself with his hands, but just ended up landing right on the bottle-

It shattered.

Just like his entire fucking life-

Pain blossomed in his side where a piece of glass must have...

He felt himself convulse, felt the ghost of hands restraining him once more.

He thrashed in response-

“More sedative-”

*What.*

“Need to calm him, he’s hurting himself-” Sound... blurry and vague like... like it was coming through a filter... or a gramophone maybe?

He jerked as a sharp pain stabbed through his arm-

Then he sank into the cold pavement...

Then the pavement wasn’t so cold...



“You really are a disappointment...”

Kaeya barely had the energy to look up... but all the same he tried...

“P-Papa...” He reached a hand up, toward his father... A sob escaped his throat.

“Every opportunity. I gave you *every* opportunity!” A star-shaped pupil turned red- straight navy hair, morphed- purple, red, back to blue-

“*We* gave you *every* chance to survive, to make something of yourself! And *this* is what you do with it?!”

The man- men- knelt-

“You try every day to kill yourself- alcohol, drugs, dangerous solo missions-”

*F-Father no, I’m sorry- It’s not on purpose- it’s not-*

“You steal from me. You worm your way into my family then betray me- over and *over* again-”

*Papa-*

Kaeya cried.

“Hey, shh...” The ghost of hands on his cheeks. A warping, disorienting voice, and a breeze,  
“Calm down, Kaeya...”

Kaeya cried harder.

“It’s okay... just another minute and you’ll be out... don’t fight it...”

*Out...?*

Kaeya relaxed a fraction as the pavement grew soft, then disappeared entirely along with the judgmental specters of long-dead parental figures-

He blinked his eyes open.

*A dream...*

*A nightmare...*

*Maybe a little bit of flashback thrown in for spice...*

Jean’s voice danced and swayed around him- from behind him...

And he realized that he was leaning back into someone- and their arms were tight, yet gentle around his chest-

“That’s right, you’re safe...” Jean again- Jean was the one holding him- “No one here is going to hurt you...”

There were others in the room... their outlines swayed strangely. Like a council casting judgment.

One stepped forward-

Jean’s arms tightened, “The restraints aren’t necessary, Victoria. We’re fine here.”

“Grandmaster, it’s as much for his safety as ours-”

Kaeya’s vision finally managed to focus on what looked like manacles in the woman’s hands. Though these ones were at least padded...

He decided he didn’t want to perceive anything anymore and squeezed his eyes shut-

“He was having a nightmare, and it was, quite frankly, *stupid* of you all to start- one; while I wasn’t here, and two; while he was in such a state-” Jean very obviously bit back anger, “He’s been through a lot, and at any rate, he’s awake now, aren’t you, Kae?”

Kaeya let himself go limp when he realized he was actually holding Jean’s arms quite tightly. The part of him that was still somewhat cognizant grew terrified that he might have bruised her wrists-

Jean sighed and loosened her own grip. Then she leaned him back into the bed as she crawled out from behind him.

Kaeya could already feel his breath evening, and his surroundings growing hazy once more-

Jean’s hand found his hair, “It’s just a sedative, Kaeya...” Her smile chased away the worst of the anxiety, “Once you’re asleep again, we’ll treat your wounds,” Her thumb rubbed his temple, “You’ll feel much, *much* better the next time you wake up, I promise...”

Kaeya decided to trust her... not that he had a choice, really...

This time, his sleep was dreamless.

~~~~~

Chapter End Notes

Next chapter tomorrow! Hopefully!

It's Been a Long Day

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

Diluc

Diluc stumbled up the steps to the Cathedral.

He'd managed to avoid the majority of prying eyes- it wasn't that difficult considering it was well into the wee hours of the morning.

But there was only one main entrance for the Cathedral, and Diluc didn't really see much point in sneaking around anymore, or in trying to sneak in- as he'd done at the city gate- since he'd have to ask where Kaeya was once he got inside anyway.

The single guard posted at the entrance startled visibly when his gaze landed on Diluc-

"M-Master Ragnvindr-?!" The young man lurched forward, arms outstretched as if to catch him- which Diluc found rather silly-

Please. Call me Diluc- Master Ragnvindr was my father-

"I- What?"

Oh fuck- did I say that out loud...?

Diluc must have...

He groaned. As soon as the guard's hands gripped his arms, offering support, Diluc's own legs buckled.

Diluc's left hand and arm were growing somewhat numb. Between the blood loss from the Hoarder's knife and the tourniquet fashioned from one of his extraneous belts, he'd seriously debated trying to cauterize it at least three separate times on his trek back.

What was one more burn on top of a cacophony of others?

He'd refrained. He wasn't sure if he made the right decision-

It took everything he had to remain somewhat upright, even with the young knight's help.

"Stars, sir- What happened?!" Panic flitted across the young man's face, but was quickly replaced with a pathetic attempt at a neutral expression- "No, sorry- I mean- protocol, fuck- uh-"

Diluc huffed a small almost-laugh, which kind of hurt, weirdly enough- and was a little rude. He must have been in worse shape than he realized because the kid in front of him really was kind of freaking out-

"Okay, let's get you sitting, then I'll get help from inside-"

"I'm fine-" Diluc's throat felt raw. Probably from all the screaming and shouting. And the throwing up- "Just- just help me inside, please... I have-" Coughing fit- "I've t'find my brother-"

“Your brother- Oh, right- Captain Alberich?”

Diluc’s chest ached. Both from electro-burns and from the fact that the man had to ask...

“Right, yes, okay- Grandmaster Jean mentioned you would be coming, but I’m sorry I thought you were just retrieving something- did you get attacked, or-?”

Diluc grunted. He was running out of energy. Both for this pointless conversation and in general.

He pulled away and started stumbling toward the door-

“Stars! Slow down!” The knight pulled Diluc’s arm over his shoulder, then *finally* led him into the Cathedral.

—

Jean shooed the kind, yet somewhat ill-trained young knight away, and quickly shut the door to the room-

“Stars above, Diluc- what happened?”

Diluc grunted. He hadn’t taken his eyes off of his brother’s unconscious form since entering.

Kaeya looked gaunt, and pale. Some of the bruising had faded, but his skin still looked mottled-

Jean shoved Diluc into a chair.

As soon as her hands left his shoulders he was standing again-

“Diluc, for the love of the gods, please sit down-”

“Is he alright?” Diluc swayed where he stood. He leaned against the bed, and his hand hovered-

But he didn’t touch.

He shouldn’t touch...

Kaeya’s head was wrapped in gauze, and some of the smaller cuts on his face were treated with little butterfly bandages.

A larger cut above his eyebrow had a couple of stitches.

His left hand was a collage of bandages and poltices- likely both for pain and to fight infection.

Diluc couldn’t see his torso, as Kaeya was tucked quite firmly under at least three blankets.

An IV wound its way like a snake- up from Kaeya’s good arm and into a little pouch full of liquid-

There was a scraping sound, and Diluc looked up to find Jean shoving a relatively cushy armchair close to the other side of the bed-

Diluc blinked.

And Jean stepped around, then pulled him gently toward the chair, “There. You can sit nice and close, okay?”

He sat.

Her fingers started prodding around his scalp. He didn't remember a head wound-

"Diluc. Sit quietly and let me treat you. Please." Jean's tone was an interesting mix of authority and desperation.

Diluc sat quietly and let her treat him.

She poked and prodded him a bit, helped him out of his coat- which was a lot more difficult, and *a lot* more painful than he'd been expecting- and then she bustled out of the room to collect supplies.

When she came back, she paused, and her gaze darted down, then softened as she noticed that Diluc had... somewhat impulsively grabbed Kaeya's uninjured hand.

Kaeya hadn't stirred in the slightest, and Diluc could feel his brother's pulse in his wrist so it made him feel a lot better, and...

Diluc felt his cheeks redden as he looked away.

Jean didn't say anything.

~~~~~

### ***Kaeya***

Kaeya felt like utter shit when he woke up.

Truly, like he'd been beaten to hell, thrown into a meat grinder, and then cooked at high temperature-

His eye cracked halfway open, and then the light of the room added to his misery and stabbed straight through his retina and into his brain-

He groaned.

He moved to wipe at his face, but any movement of his left hand sent shockwaves of agony up his arm that were bad enough to make him nauseous.

And he couldn't move his right for some reason because it was restrained-

A shock of pure anxiety had his eyes flying open after all as he impulsively yanked his arm away-

He yelped as his entire side *screamed* at him in pain.

Diluc also yelped, as Kaeya accidentally kind of smacked him in the face. Because his brother had been holding his arm. Had basically been cuddling with his arm as he laid with his head on the side of the bed.

The pair stared at each other for a long moment. Both of them confused and at least somewhat disoriented.

Kaeya's vision swam, and he fidgeted a bit to try and relieve some of the pain that his earlier movement had caused-

Diluc swallowed and blinked, then he wiped at his eyes- "N-Nurse-" He stood stiffly, and somewhat awkwardly- "I-I'll get a nurse- you're in pain-"

Concern practically oozed out of every syllable.

Kaeya would have questioned it, maybe teased his brother, but he really was in considerable discomfort, and talking just didn't seem worth it at the moment.

Keeping his eyes open didn't seem worth it either, as his vision continued to warp all around him-

Diluc was wearing... weird clothes. A loose tunic and pants. They almost looked like pajamas.

He had bandages all along his left wrist, on his face. His neck was wrapped almost like a mummy, and he *hobbled* to the door, clutching his side tightly as he moved.

Kaeya wanted to cry.

Because now *he* was concerned, but his brother was gone, and...

He tried to sit up a little straighter. His breath hitched painfully as he failed, and practically flopped back into the mattress.

Heels clicked on tile, and the door opened quickly once more-

A nurse-nun walked in, carrying a tray with... something on it.

Diluc limped in right after her, which was a genuine relief. He closed the door gently behind himself.

"Alright, hon, can you tell me exactly what hurts and how bad?" The nurse laid a gentle hand on his shoulder.

Kaeya didn't like it very much. But shrugging off the unwanted touch would have induced hellish pain, so he kept still and tried to force his vision to focus.

He opened his mouth. Then closed it when he couldn't force words through his throat-

The hand on his shoulder squeezed, "Okay... That's alright sweetheart..." She turned to Diluc, "I'm just going to go with the standard dose, if he still seems uncomfortable in about ten minutes come find me, okay? I'll reassess from there."

"Okay..." Diluc sounded... miserable. Kaeya couldn't remember the last time his brother had sounded so unsure, so anxious-

The woman's hand left his shoulder, and Kaeya squeezed his eyes shut as she started moving around- possibly mixing medicine somewhere behind him.

"Is... Do you put that right in the IV, then...?" Again, Diluc's voice was so *hesitant*-

"Mhm!" The nurse's on the other hand, was irritatingly chipper- "It will get into his system much quicker that way. And we still don't know how he'll take orally ingested medicine, or even water yet, so it's... safer, we'll say."

More movement.

"If you could get him to try and drink something while he's awake, that would be wonderful Master Ragnvindr!"

*Ew. Gross.*

*Don't call him that, Master Ragnvindr is our father-*

*Was... our father...*

"I- Um... yeah... I can... do that..."

"Wonderful! How are you feeling yourself, hon? Any concerning pain? It's been a while since you've had something-"

"I'm fine." Curt. A little closer to Diluc's usual M.O.

"Alright, get some rest, both of you." More footsteps. Kaeya cracked an eye open- "Make sure you keep drinking plenty of water yourself Master Ragnvindr, and my offer still stands to set up a bed for you-"

"I'll stay here. Thanks."

The woman frowned. Then left.

Kaeya blinked his eyes open fully.

He didn't... really like doctors and nurses on a good day... (Jean aside, of course)

It wasn't anything personal, he just-

"So can you really not talk right now, or are you just being petulant for the healthcare workers?" Diluc turned and picked up a glass from the side table and plopped a straw in it.

Kaeya glared at him. But he couldn't maintain true irritation... not when his brother's expression looked so... haunted... Not when his brother was so pale, and in obvious pain- with bags under his eyes and a hunch to his gait that made him look at least ten years older-

So much of Diluc's neck and left cheek were patched up that it seemed like his skin might have been made of gauze. The flesh around those bandages was blotchy and red with clear irritation. From his chin almost all the way up to his eye. Covered. Covered and red-

Kaeya swallowed and kind of cleared his throat a bit.

Diluc hummed.

"W-Why d'you-" Kaeya started hacking and wheezing as soon as he tried to talk-

Diluc's eyes widened and he immediately set the glass aside in favor of sitting Kaeya somewhat upright- enough to rub circles into his back-

Every movement, every breath, *hurt*- sent waves of radiating pain through his side-

"So fucking stupid-" Diluc mumbled, even as he held Kaeya and continued rubbing his back.

Kaeya winced.

*Fuck you too then...*

*I was just trying to-*

"Sorry- I'm sorry-" Diluc squeezed him tighter- "I wasn't talking to you, just breathe, K, you're

okay-”

*Is he panicking right now?*

*He sounds like he’s freaking out-*

Kaeya’s throat felt like a fucking desert, so he didn’t try to ask. He kind of groaned, as a proxy.

But... all told, he was actually already in somewhat less pain- in spite of the coughing fit- so whatever drugs the lady had given him must have been pretty good.

He let his head fall heavily on his brother’s shoulder as his breath finally came a little easier. He felt... exhausted... to say the least...

Diluc leaned and grabbed the water glass again, “Do you think you can drink something? It should help...”

Kaeya nodded weakly, which wasn’t great for his headache, but... whatever...

He took small sips as the straw found his mouth.

His throat felt instantly better.

He hummed when he was done, and the straw left.

Then he was being leaned back once more-

“I’ll get Jean-” Diluc stood as he gently laid Kaeya back down, “I’ll get Jean and- and get out of your hair-”

*What.*

Kaeya reached weakly for his brother’s sleeve before he could properly retreat- “W-What...?”

“She’s just in the other room, taking a break. She needed some sleep, so-”

*Well... you probably shouldn’t wake her, then...*

Kaeya frowned. And kept clinging to his brother’s sleeve.

After a minute Diluc apparently took the hint and sat back down in the chair across from him.

And Kaeya let him go, it was taking a lot of energy and focus to cling, anyway...

“D’lu...?”

“Yes?” Diluc’s expression was one big, angry scowl.

Or... maybe not angry... but it was definitely a scowl-

“Y’look like shit...” Talking made him breathe heavier, as it took a lot of effort. But it no longer hurt, and it no longer made him cough, so... a victory... Kaeya supposed...

Diluc just... blinked at him. “Right...”

“W-Why d’you look like shit...?”



Diluc frowned, “Why do I-?” Then his eyes widened. He patted at his chest, then legs like some sort of cartoon character searching for something. Then he stood and started rummaging through a nearby drawer-

“L-Lu-?”

“Here-” Diluc turned back toward the bed, and Kaeya got a glimpse in the drawer- Diluc’s vision was still in it when he slammed it shut-

But then his brother held up *Kaeya’s* vision.

Kaeya stared.

He continued staring as Diluc pressed the stone into his good hand.

Then tears started slipping down his cheeks, though he couldn’t quite put his finger on why...

Cryo energy pulsed, and it was such a comfort... such a good feeling- as something he hadn’t realized he’d been missing snapped into place... almost like a puzzle piece...

Diluc fidgeted, “Kae... you okay...?”

Kaeya nodded, then wiped his face on his arm- moving his left still hurt a bit and he winced.

The pain distracted him, and he held up his left hand. It was... kind of swollen, and partially wrapped in bandages.

Even just twitching the fingers ached so, SO bad, and he was fairly certain he’d still had his pinky last he’d looked...

He tried to take deep, even breaths.

But they were anything but-

“Hey, look at me-” Diluc scooted closer, “It’s okay Kaeya- the worst of the infection is gone- you’re gonna be alright-”

Kaeya made a strangled sound. He would have been embarrassed, were he not so distraught-

Diluc’s hand found his arm, “The infection was spreading, and they had to take the pinky, I’m sorry-”

“W-Why c-couldn’t they take the m-middle one instead-” Kaeya let out a childish whine.

Diluc blinked, “What? It wasn’t- It wasn’t a *choice*-” His brother kind of balked, obviously unsure of what to say- “And at any rate, how is that better-”

Kaeya sobbed, “Grip st-strength, Diluc! You can’t hold shit without a *pinky*!” His throat was starting to hurt again with the shouting...

Diluc blinked some more, “R-Right... Okay, yeah, but that’s... really not what we should be focusing on right now-”

Kaeya whined.

“Alright- okay-” Diluc grunted as he moved to sit on the edge of the bed- “You’re alright-”

Kaeya shoved his face into his brother's shoulder as Diluc's arm wound around his back.

Diluc winced, but held him tight all the same.

Dizziness warred with disorientation, which warred with- with something else-

"I'm s-sorry-" Kaeya hiccupped.

"You have nothing to be sorry for-" Diluc rubbed circles into his back. Kaeya just wished they were warmed with pyro, it was a little chilly in the room-

"S'my f-fault-" Kaeya's breath hitched painfully, "S-S-stole your w-wine..."

"What-" Diluc fidgeted, "Kaeya, I don't care about that-" More circles in his back, and a gentle hand on the side of his face, "Honestly, *I* should be the one apologizing- that fight was *stupid*, and technically half the wine stock belongs to you by rights anyway-"

"Don't..." More tears fell as Kaeya whined.

"Don't what, Kaeya? You really need to relax-"

"Don't be nice t'me..." Kaeya hiccupped... "I know y'hate me..." Despite the statement and request, Kaeya clung.

He'd always been, at his core, a walking contradiction-

Diluc sighed heavily, "Kaeya, I don't..." He grew quiet, which was worse.

Then he pulled Kaeya into an even tighter hug- it hurt a bit, in multiple places. But Kaeya would have found it much more painful if his brother let him go, "I don't hate you... I never hated you, I just..."

The silence stretched.

Kaeya could feel Diluc shaking as he hugged him tight.

Kaeya himself hadn't stopped sobbing like a child-

"I'm sorry... I'm an asshole and I'm sorry..."

Kaeya grunted out what was almost a laugh. Almost.

Diluc sighed shakily, "You need to relax... You'll pull a stitch..."

Almost reluctantly, Diluc leaned Kaeya back into the mattress.

Kaeya didn't have the energy to fight him, or to cling anymore, so he instead pouted. You know, as he continued to cry like a baby-

Diluc picked up his vision where it had fallen into the mattress, then pressed it into Kaeya's healthy hand. Kaeya didn't know when he'd let it go.

Kaeya didn't feel like he knew much of anything at the given moment.

"Kaeya...?" Diluc tucked a strand of hair behind Kaeya's ear, then also pulled the blanket up and over him. Then his brother's gaze darted to the door and back, "I have a very important question to

ask you, then you can sleep, okay?"

Kaeya grunted.

Then he jumped as Diluc nudged his eye open with a thumb. He hadn't realized he'd closed it-

"Kaeya, it's important-" Diluc's face was stained with tears, but his expression was stern- suddenly all business- "Who else did you tell about-" His brother paused to work his jaw- "Who else knows about... about your past?"

Kaeya felt his face scrunch as tears started to press their way out once more-

*Why are you doing this...?*

*Don't-*

*Don't make me think about this-*

"S-Sorry," Diluc smoothed them away with a thumb, "I'm sorry-"

"Y- You know..."

Diluc's face twisted, "Yes, I do, but that's not important-"

*Of course it's important...*

"I don't know... if you remember... but..." His brother chewed his lip for a moment, as if debating something. As if he wasn't sure he should tell Kaeya something.

Pain. Worry. Diluc swallowed thickly, "The Treasure Hoarder- the man who had your vision knew- he *also* knew where you're from, Kaeya-"

Diluc's palm cupped his cheek gently, "I need to know where he could have gotten the information."

Kaeya blinked dully up at his brother.

*What.*

"I dunno, Lu..." His stomach twisted around itself in something between anxiety and relief-

He started crying. Again.

"It's okay- shh..." Diluc ran careful fingers through his hair, "I'm sorry I brought it up right now- it doesn't matter right now-"

Kaeya cried harder.

Because it *definitely* mattered.

And he definitely felt horrifically guilty that a small part of himself had thought-

Diluc was many things.

But his brother was *never* one to play games like this. To be so psychologically cruel like this.

So if he was asking, then it genuinely, truly meant that he wasn't the one who-

Diluc sighed. Then he carefully sat once more on the edge of the bed. He winced a little bit as he moved, “Try to sleep, Kaeya...”

Kaeya grunted, “D- Don’t-” He gripped his brother’s sleeve in his good hand, around his vision, “P-Please don’t leave...”

Everything hurt.

The realization made everything hurt even worse. Despite it being an objectively *good* thing that his brother wasn’t the one who threw him to the wolves, as they say.

Diluc blew out a weary breath, “I won’t... I promise...” He gave Kaeya a wobbly little smile, “I’ll be right in that chair when you wake up, okay?” The smile turned somewhat impish, “Or like, in the bathroom or something if you have shitty timing.”

Kaeya relaxed a fraction at the stupid joke-

“Get it?” Diluc nudged his arm, “‘Shitty timing’ because I’d be in the bathroom-”

“I got it, Lu...” It had been a *really* long time since he’d heard his brother tell any sort of joke. Let alone a stupid pun...

It was... weird.

But nice.

Diluc nodded. Then he leaned down and pressed a kiss to Kaeya’s forehead, “Sleep, I’ll be right here, I promise.” Once more, he tucked the blankets in around him, giving Kaeya another clear view of the bandages all around his arm.

“Y’never s-said how y’got hurt...” Kaeya’s eyelids drooped.

“I’ll tell you all about it later, when you’re feeling better,” He smoothed Kaeya’s hair, more gentle than he’d been in years- “I’m alright, so don’t worry. Get some sleep, K.”

“Alright...” Kaeya hugged his vision close as he settled under the blankets.

He was out in under a minute.

~~~~~

Chapter End Notes

ummm I think the next chapter is the 28th! i think

It's Just the Tip of the Iceberg

Chapter Notes

extra warnings for self-harm and extremely unhealthy thought patterns!

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

-Anger Borne of Worry - Headache-

Diluc

Diluc sat heavily in the armchair.

He wasn't-

He hadn't been expecting...

He didn't know what he'd been expecting, but it wasn't for Kaeya to fall apart like that, to *cling* to him like that-

Kaeya was in rough shape... to say the least... but regardless, Diluc hadn't thought his own presence would be a *comfort*-

He'd definitely assumed he was being... a bit selfish by staying.

*Then again... would Jean have **let** me stay if she'd thought...*

Diluc's head pounded.

Stress and a concussion didn't mix well, it seemed.

He'd apparently knocked his noggin pretty badly at some point. Jean had been extremely concerned. Was *still* extremely concerned, as was obvious by the way she kept giving him little tests every time she checked in.

He figured it was *probably* the overload reaction that knocked him out for a bit. That seemed like an intelligent and logical assumption...

He sighed and stared at his hands. They shook.

He balled them into fists. They still shook...

He sighed again and leaned back, practically melting into the chair. He stared at the ceiling.

The last time he'd been electrocuted anywhere near as badly it had taken about a week for him to stop shaking.

He'd assumed this time around was worse, since he'd *definitely* been unconscious for at least a short while... but it must not have been, because last time he'd also had a stutter for a few days.

And all things considered, Diluc was speaking fine- and was also processing speech and sound just

fine, so...

Electro's a bitch...

You never really knew exactly what it was gonna do to you...

The burn on his side smarted, illustrating that exact point.

It was incredible that he hadn't realized how bad it was while charging after the... now dead Stefan...

He'd certainly noticed while dragging his half-dead ass back into the city, that was for sure...

—

Diluc didn't remember falling asleep. He hadn't intended to, really.

So when he felt hands on his arms and near his legs- seemingly out of nowhere- the jolt of pure terror and adrenaline that rocked through him was disorienting.

He thrashed, very suddenly awake as his sub-conscious mind expected a knife, or perhaps a bat, or maybe even heated metal, if his worst experiences were to repeat-

Jean jumped back in surprise, and the blanket she'd been tucking over his lap fell to the ground.

Diluc gripped the arms of the chair hard enough to make the leather creak.

His heart hammered in his chest, and breathing irritated the burns all around his trunk-

"Hey, look at me-" Jean knelt in front of him, voice gentle and brow drawn in concern- "Look at me- tell me your name and where you are."

Diluc sucked in a ragged breath. His eyes darted even as clarity and understanding seeped in. And his face scrunched in irritation, even as he understood why Jean would ask this of him- "D-Diluc Ragnvindr-" He forced another breath- slightly less ragged, "We're in the Cathedral..."

"Good," Jean smiled, "Now, can you list-"

"I'm fucking *fine*, Jean! You don't have to coddle me with your-" The words died in his throat as one: Jean outright *flinched*, and two: Kaeya fidgeted and kind of mumbled at his shout- though his brother remained unconscious by some miracle.

Diluc clenched his jaw shut. He felt his eyes prick.

Why am I such a fucking asshole?!

Jean, to her credit, recovered quickly. Though Diluc did *not* deserve it-

"You're alright Luc, breathe," She stayed kneeling in front of him, "Everything's okay-"

"I'm sorry-" Diluc choked-

"Hey, shh," Now Jean reached a hand forward to rest on his knee. Diluc hated it. Hated the way his skin crawled at the gentle contact. He forced himself not to react- "It's alright. I know I just scared you-"

Diluc looked away.

You're too forgiving...

Jean sighed. Then she stood, "You should really lay down properly, Diluc... You won't heal well all scrunched up like this..." Her hands found her hips, "Also, I think it'll help you relax better-"

"I'm not leaving." Diluc scowled down at the corner of the room. His heart rate was finally starting to settle along with the ghosts of his past. They resumed their vigil in the darker recesses of his mind- in the corners of his vision where paranoia also dwelled-

He did his best to dismiss the overdramatic thoughts, and instead focused on glaring daggers through two little dust bunnies that the cleaning staff missed.

Were this the winery, he probably would have taken the opportunity to give the cleaning staff a talking-to. Forced normalcy, and an outlet for frustration that was *actually* warranted.

If a little harsh...

Stars above... I'm turning into a crotchety old man-

Diluc considered the ins and outs of raising the winery staff's pay as his mind flitted through unwarranted outbursts and overly harsh criticisms in the aftermath of rain soaked nights and-

Jean huffed, "I'm not saying you should leave, I'm saying you should-"

"I'm not leaving this *room*, Jean!" His shout cut off into a frustrated grunt. He didn't understand why he always had to keep yelling all the damn time-

Jean's eye twitched.

It seemed even saints had their limits.

She clapped her hands together in front of her chest in a mockery of prayer. Her eyes grew wide in obvious irritation- "If you would let me *talk*-"

Diluc let her talk.

Jean sucked in a deep, calming, breath of her own, "I will bring a cot *in here* for you. It can only be a small one, because the room is small, but regardless it will definitely be better than sleeping in the chair."

Diluc blinked.

Then he grew truly irritated. Not with Jean, but in general- "They have cots?" He felt his entire expression scrunch, "Cots that can move around?! That one nurse has been *nagging* me about going to my own room, and this entire time I could have been laying on a portable cot? In here?"

*I have been napping- either sitting upright or with my head down on Kaeya's tiny bed for **hours** now-*

Jean's lips were a fine line, "Which nurse?"

"Jacqueline."

Jean blew an irritated little breath out her nose, "I'll be right back."

Jean's heels clicked on the tile as she moved with purpose out into the hall.

—

“When did you last take something?” Jean's hands stilled with Diluc's latest wince. She'd only just helped him out of the slightly scratchy hospital tunic. She hadn't even touched the bandages around his torso yet-

“Jean, I am *fine*-”

“Diluc, I swear to the gods if you don't answer my question-” Her face scrunched, and obvious effort was put into the neutral tone that followed, “Diluc, you suffered multiple first and second degree burns. You are dehydrated, and-”

“I'm fine!”

Jean's eyes practically bulged in barely restrained irritation.

She grabbed his arm, and Diluc bit back a yelp-

She pinched the back of his hand.

“Ow-”

They both watched as the skin *slowly* smoothed back out.

Jean clipped off his complaints with an extremely clipped tone of her own- “Yup. Dehydrated. You are drinking a glass of water right now.” She grabbed one off the nightstand and held it out expectantly.

Diluc grumbled as he rubbed at the back of his assaulted hand. Then he took the glass. He had no reason to fight aside from a petty sense of pride that even he realized was... kind of stupid...

He sighed, then brought the glass up to his lips and mumbled, “I haven't had anything since the last round of antibiotics...”

He hadn't been planning to take any pain meds until the next round. At the earliest. The nurses hadn't really forced them, and they certainly didn't watch to make sure he actually took them... and Diluc didn't like the way they made his head fuzzy anyway, so-

So he forced his gaze not to flit toward the trash can.

Jean sighed, exasperated.

Diluc drank his water and looked away.

“Diluc. You are in pain. It is okay to take medicine for it,” Jean's expression softened, “Makes my job much easier, to be honest- when you're not *completely* miserable while I'm trying to heal you.”

He grunted.

Then held the half empty glass toward Jean-

She shoved it right back, “Nuh uh. Drink it all. And you'll drink another one after I've redressed your chest. And another after I've treated your face and neck-”

Diluc opened his mouth to argue-

“Diluc, by all the gods I *will* stick an IV in you if you don’t cooperate!” Jean glared- “What part of first and second degree burns across thirty percent of your body is confusing?!?”

Diluc grumbled into his glass, “Third degree would’ve been worse-”

Jean’s eye twitched.

And Diluc drained the glass.

“You realize the burn across your cheek is this close-” Jean pinched two of her fingers together, “To being classified third degree. Right? I do believe I mentioned that little detail-” She gestured with a hand, “Without healing magic you would have needed *skin grafts*, Diluc! This isn’t the sort of thing you can just brush off and ignore!”

Diluc looked away again, and his hand came up instinctively to cup his own cheek.

It really did hurt...

A lot of him really did hurt...

Listing body parts that *weren’t* in some measure of pain would probably be more efficient than listing ones that were.

“I’m fine...”

If he said it enough times it would be true.

It wasn’t like pain medication would make him heal faster. And feeling the results of his idiocy- the fallout of his mistakes- was the least he deserved.

His gaze darted to his brother. To his brother’s partially visible scars.

Diluc’s own would look much the same, once healed. But none of them were directly over his *fucking eye*-

Jean sighed and pinched the bridge of her nose, “You will be the death of me. I thought it was going to be Klee, or Kaeya, or possibly even Albedo with one of his riskier experiments, but nope. It’s you. Not even in my thirties and you’ve given me high blood pressure-”

Diluc’s expression twisted. It sent radiating pain through his face and neck, which he ignored- “Dramatic...”

“Says the man who went to fetch his brother’s vision and came back half-dead.” Her hands found her hips, “And refuses to take pain medication for some unspecified reason-”

Diluc grunted and looked away. Again.

Heat rose in his cheeks.

“I’m not treating or healing you until you take something. I’m not as tough as the nurses here, and I can’t stand healing someone when they’re in pain and they don’t need to be-”

“Maybe I *deserve* to be!”

The shout felt like it echoed.

Diluc felt his eyes widen and his expression slacken.

He hadn't... meant to say that out loud...

It sounded really fucking bad when he said it out loud-

Kaeya shifted with a groan on the bed. His eyes didn't even crack open before he settled.

Diluc stared at his brother, and his jaw reclinched.

His face and neck felt hot, and his chest felt really tight all of a sudden-

Jean, meanwhile, stared at Diluc. Her expression was somewhere between assessing, worried, and... and something else that Diluc couldn't quite pinpoint.

Anxiety thrummed through his veins.

He rubbed at his wrist. His thumb pressed down against bandaged stitches and the pressure was painful, yet grounding.

It was nice-

He pressed harder without thinking-

Jean knelt in front of him and pulled his hands apart, "Stop."

Diluc looked away.

"Diluc, breathe." She squeezed his hands, "Let's just relax for a moment, yeah?"

Diluc blinked hard as tears started squeezing out.

A light breeze cooled them against his skin. His headache eased, as did the worst of the ache in his cheek down through his neck.

He leaned forward until his forehead rested gently on Jean's shoulder. She wrapped an arm around him and rubbed careful circles between his shoulder blades.

"You're alright, Luc... It's alright..." She pecked a soft kiss into his uninjured cheek.

Diluc choked at the care.

He didn't want it, dammit-

"Can I tell you something? Something really important?" Her hand came up to card gentle fingers through his hair.

Diluc grunted. Words failed him consistently, so there was no real point in trying to force them now-

"You don't deserve to be in pain. And..."

Deft fingers scratched lightly at his scalp. It felt really nice...

"And seeing you in pain causes *me* pain. You do realize that, right? That seeing you hurt..." Jean's

voice wobbled, “Seeing both of you hurt... hurts me... too.”

Diluc whined. Like some sort of child-

He brought his hands up to cling to the back of her shirt as he started crying again. Also like a child.

“Kaeya doesn’t want you to hurt, Diluc. He’s already worried enough...” A wet laugh- “Well... when he’s conscious he’s already worried enough... Do you really want to pile onto that? Hm?”

“L-Low b-blow Jeanie...”

Jean hummed.

And Diluc kind of... melted. He just... gave up on pretending like...

He stayed where he was, draped over Jean’s shoulder as she knelt in front of the low cot.

It wasn’t all that comfortable, but Diluc realized that he really, *really* needed the hug... And pretending like he didn’t had been far more painful than the current physical discomfort.

“I’m tired, Jean...” Bone-achingly tired. Tired to the point of near-disorientation. Eyes-burning, head aching, dizzyingly tired.

Jean hummed, then fidgeted.

“I’ll finish redressing your torso, then you can at least lay down comfortably. Sound like a plan?”

Diluc nodded, still draped over her shoulder like a cloak, “Pain meds please...”

So tired...

“Thank you.” She pressed another kiss into his cheek, then she stood, gently pulling him somewhat upright with her- though he remained sitting- “I’ll be right back, okay Luc?”

Diluc nodded again. He continued holding her hands in his own. He also continued staring through the floorboards.

Jean pulled away, and Diluc let her go.

She’d be back soon anyway.

~~~~~

## Chapter End Notes

I don't know what or when the next chapter will be tbh ☺

I'll probably keep looking through the prompts even though october is almost over, but i do also have a decently solid idea of where i want this to go next (at least the next chapter or two)

I haven't decided if the ending of this is just going to center on relationships and

recovery, or if I want to make it more epic and get into the mystery of who sold Kaeya out.

We'll see I guess, let me know what y'all want- it's all pretty much up in the air moving forward lol

Oh! Also! Thank y'all for your patience, I know this one was a couple days late

# Nowhere to Run

## Chapter Notes

The confrontation is not as intense as the title/prompts imply lmao

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

### ***Cornered - Confrontation***

#### ***Diluc***

Diluc winced a little bit as Jean tied off the last bandage.

“There, you’re good for now. Time to get some sleep.”

Diluc hummed.

The painkillers really did help-

“Wha’ happened...”

Diluc stiffened.

Jean did too a bit, as they both turned toward the bed.

Kaeya was turned onto his side watching them. He blinked owlshly, curled tightly in the blanket.

Jean grimaced, “I’d really rather you didn’t lay like that, Kaeya... You’re putting unnecessary strain on your side. Not to mention your knee-”

She stepped toward the bed and tried to coax him to lay a little more flat.

Which was probably a losing battle. At least in Diluc’s experience.

For as long as he could remember, Kaeya preferred sleeping almost curled up in a ball. Kind of like a little armadillo-

“S’uncomfortable...” Kaeya pouted, but complied with little fuss... somewhat. Despite Jean’s best efforts, Kaeya managed to remain sort of sideways, “Why’s my brother all burned...?”

Diluc felt his expression flatten. He was hovering somewhere between anxious about discussing his... *adventure*... and irritated that Kaeya was asking Jean when he was sitting *right there*-

“You should probably ask him that yourself, Kaeya. He won’t tell *me*, so-”

*Oh, FUCK you, Jean-*

Diluc’s entire face scrunched as the anxiety won out and he glared at his childhood best friend-

Kaeya’s head turned and he blinked at Diluc, eyes wide with concern, and weirdly... hesitant... almost nervous.

His little brother worked his jaw, then looked away.

Diluc wasn't sure what the expression meant...

There was a time when he could read his brother like a book.

And that time had long since passed...

He sighed, "I fell down a flight of stairs into a thicket of flaming flowers. Feel free to make fun of me."

Jean groaned. Because that was about the stupidest lie he could have possibly come up with.

Kaeya snorted, "Terrible liar..." But a small smile tilted his lips, and some of his usual tone seeped in behind the floaty... weakness? Diluc was having trouble defining it. But the important thing was that Kaeya sounded a little bit more like himself, which was a relief.

Kaeya's brow furrowed a fraction as he mumbled, "M'surprised you're still here..."

Diluc gritted his teeth and shrugged, attempting to remain casual- "You asked me to stay..." His gaze found the corner again, "Would you prefer I leave...?"

*Please don't ask me to leave...*

Diluc wasn't certain he could survive the anxiety of... not being close by.

Kaeya had quite literally almost *died*.

Even after getting him to the cathedral, between the blood loss and severe infection, things had been touch and go for far too long-

"No... I like having you around..." Kaeya's voice remained soft, "Even if you are really grumpy..."

*Oh thank the gods-*

Diluc grunted, then let out a flat, "Thanks."

"Y'quite welcome..." Kaeya was smirking when Diluc looked back.

Jean's hand found his hair, and Kaeya's eyes closed as she smoothed her fingers through it. Her expression was relaxed, though melancholic. She sat on the edge of the bed after another moment, clearly just as unwilling to leave as Diluc.

Diluc himself sighed, then leaned over slowly until he was finally laying down. It was lucky the burns were only on one side of his body. It made getting comfortable relatively simple.

He pulled the warm blanket up and around himself and watched as Jean continued to brush gentle fingers through his brother's hair.

It was good they had each other...

Diluc often worried...

Kaeya mumbled something that Diluc couldn't make out.

His eyelids started drooping. Kaeya wasn't talking to him, so he felt no pressure to figure out what was said.

Jean's smile widened, "I can do that..." She cleared her throat lightly.

Then she started singing- humming really.

The tune was... unfamiliar...

Or... maybe very vaguely familiar...?

It reminded him of summer nights out by the manor. Nights catching fireflies and telling stories. Nights spent stargazing with the two people Diluc trusted most in this world, aside from maybe his father-

He sighed as sleep pulled at his tattered edges.

*Oh... Kaeya used to hum this song...*

Often when he was happy and not really paying attention.

Sometimes when he was sad... when Kaeya would get really sad for reasons unknown to Diluc, and he'd find his little brother curled up in the pantry, or a closet... curled into himself and humming as if trying to comfort himself.

Something empty opened up in Diluc's chest. Something mournful and confused...

It ached as Jean's soft voice lulled him into sleep.

~~~~~

Kaeya

Kaeya stirred at a knock on the door.

He jolted a fraction, as everything was extremely unfamiliar- the brightness, the colors, right down to the smells, and the scratchiness of the bed linens-

Someone shifted in a seat next to him-

Jean shifted in the seat next to his bed. She set a book aside, and gripped his hand gently- "It's alright... You're alright, Kaeya..."

He settled, and she gave his hand a little pat before standing stiffly and moving toward the door.

Kaeya tracked her movement, and his gaze landed on his brother. Diluc was lying curled up on a tiny cot. Only part of his face and the top of his head was peeking out of a thick, cozy looking blanket.

He didn't even stir.

Kaeya kind of wanted to jump on top of him and ruffle his hair or something.

He looked too peaceful.

But Kaeya couldn't actually move all that much, and nowadays such an action was likely to get

him punched in the face. Or the gut. Likely both.

Maybe even set on fire a little bit, if Diluc had his vision on him-

Jean sighed in displeasure, "Now isn't a good time. Whatever it is can wait, I finally got him to rest properly..."

A man hummed in response.

It was familiar, and it distracted Kaeya from thoughts of torturing his brother-

He smiled. It was probably a little bit dopey. Kaeya blamed the drugs- "Beetle..."

Albedo's gaze moved from Jean to Kaeya, and he smiled right back, "Hello, Captain... how are you feeling?"

Jean stepped back, opening the door wide.

So whatever they'd been discussing must not have pertained to whether or not the alchemist should visit-

Albedo stepped quickly and silently toward the bed. Careful and intentional as always with every movement. Graceful, even- "How are you feeling?" His hand cupped the side of Kaeya's face gently, and his thumb rubbed his temple.

Kaeya sighed and let his eyes close, "Like shit, Bedo..." He paused for Dramatic Effect™, "Like absolute horseshit... but we don't have any of that around here with the distinct lack of horses, so maybe more like pig shit-"

Albedo covered his mouth with a hand as he snorted, obviously trying not to laugh too loudly.

Kaeya grinned impishly.

"I see," His thumb continued rubbing circles into Kaeya's temple, a consistent and gentle motion that was incredibly soothing and familiar- as Albedo often rubbed Kaeya's temples like this when he got a particularly bad migraine, "I am sorry that you are in such palpable discomfort... would you prefer I leave? So you can sleep?"

Kaeya grunted in displeasure. But he was kind of already falling asleep anyway-

Albedo hummed.

Kaeya spoke up, both in an attempt to stay awake, and because he really didn't want Albedo to leave, "Why're you here, Beetle...?"

I know it's not just to see me...

Albedo hummed again, as he was wont to do, "Well, primarily to make certain you are alright," He paused, and his brow pinched, "And secondarily to... ask Master Diluc a few questions."

Kaeya's own brow furrowed, and alarm seeped into his chest. It also seeped into his tone, he was sure- "What kind of questions?"

Albedo blinked at the shift. Kaeya could hear the gears turning in the young-looking man's brain.

Albedo forced a smile onto his face, "Nothing important, Kaeya. And certainly nothing you need

to worry about.”

*I am surrounded by **terrible** liars...*

Kaeya grunted in frustration.

Then he sighed heavily. His head turned as he shifted his gaze to study Diluc, who was still sound asleep.

What have you gotten yourself into, dear brother...?

He'd *obviously* been in some sort of fight.

Kaeya wasn't sure when, or why. But he *was* fairly sure that it was the reason for the Investigative Captain's questions.

And Albedo wasn't known to hold back. He was the Investigative Captain for a *reason*-

“Kaeya, please relax...” Albedo's expression and tone bore nothing but concern as his thumb continued rubbing comforting circles against his head.

Kaeya felt his eyes prick. Because relaxing didn't exactly feel possible at the current moment-

“Ka ya... relax.”

Kaeya sucked in a sharp breath as the alchemist switched to Khaenri'ahn-

His gaze darted to the door, which was closed, then to Jean, who was sitting in the armchair reading. Reading and pointedly not listening-

*“I will protect you. You **and** your brother.”* Albedo smiled gently, *“Whatever happened... to both or either of you. I've got you, okay?”*

Oh...

The tears squeezed out after all- Kaeya couldn't tell if he was relieved or...

Keeping his voice down was a little bit difficult as panic colored his tone, *“I don't know why he's hurt, B- I don't know what happened- What he did-”*

Albedo nodded, *“That's okay... We'll figure it out, so don't worry about it right now... Nothing is going to happen to **either** of you. I promise.”* Albedo's hand moved from his cheek into his hair. He switched back to common, “Why don't you get some more sleep? You clearly need it.”

Kaeya scoffed, “Rude...”

Albedo huffed and rolled his eyes, “If you're better rested, I'll bring Klee to visit later. How's that for a bribe?”

Kaeya hummed, “Effective...”

The alchemist smiled, “Good. We'll bring dinner-”

“Soft foods only, Albedo,” With the turn of a page, Jean proved that she was not, in fact, suddenly deaf, “And make certain they're easy on the stomach. He's only tried sweet gelatin and broth so far, we don't want to overdo it.”

Kaeya's face scrunched. He could really go for something more substantial... but he wasn't certain his *body* would go for something more substantial, in its current state. So he didn't try to argue.

"Understood, Grandmaster."

~~~~~

### ***Diluc***

Diluc groaned as the sound of soft conversation seeped into his dreams.

Not that he remembered what he'd been dreaming about.

But the more he woke up the more he could hear the talking, and it was sort of one of those situations where he couldn't tell the difference between what was actually being said, and what had been augmented by his half-awake brain-

"Ah... I think he's awake."

"Don't approach, Albedo- let him wake up naturally."

A hum.

And Diluc realized they were talking about him.

As if he were some sort of skittish horse or something-

He finally managed to force his eyes open.

The room was somewhat dim, and upon further inspection Diluc realized that it was because the sun must have gone down. A few lights were on in the room, but without the sunlight in the windows it really was quite dark.

Jean stepped around Kaeya's bed, then knelt in front of Diluc, "Hi there, sleepy head," Her smile was very pretty, and it dawned on Diluc just how long it had been since he'd seen it.

The thought made something ugly and sad squirm in his gut.

Jean's brow furrowed, "You alright? It's about time for antibiotics and painkillers. If you're ready."

Diluc nodded, then pushed the blanket down from around his shoulders. Cold air rushed in and he didn't really like it all that much.

But it was time for medicine.

And it was also time for him to stop... being so difficult... as much as he could manage it.

He rubbed sleep out of his eyes, and noted just how much everything ached... especially his face and neck.

He pouted, "C-Can you help me up... please...?"

Jean beamed, "Of course! That's what I'm here for!" Despite the chipper tone, her volume was low.

Kaeya must have still been asleep or something.

Diluc braced for pain as he slowly maneuvered his legs toward the edge of the short bed. Jean gently guided his shoulders upward.

Diluc couldn't stifle a groan, as absolute misery shot through his nerve endings.

Burns really sucked.

Even after healing, even after creams and salves and whatnot- they still *pulled*-

Another figure appeared, somewhat suddenly- holding a glass of water and a few pills.

Diluc blinked the last of the fuzz from his vision and the alchemist took shape.

Albedo smiled as he also knelt and offered first the water glass, then a few small pills, "Antibiotics."

Diluc grunted out a thank you.

He tossed the pills in his mouth, then took a swig of water.

Albedo held out two more, "For pain."

"Thanks..." Diluc took them as well.

"Are you hungry, Master Diluc? Klee and I picked out a few options," Albedo's smile was warm, "We have soup if your stomach is feeling a little weak. As well as some sandwiches, and some dried meats."

Diluc took another swig of water. He leaned into Jean a fraction. He was still kind of waiting to get his bearings. And his head was sort of achey...

"Um... Do... do you have bread...?" Diluc blinked somewhat sluggishly, "I would just like some bread please..."

Albedo nodded, "Sure. One moment."

Finally, Diluc's gaze darted up to Kaeya's bed-

He blinked.

His brother was sound asleep. With a tiny little spark knight tucked into his side- also asleep.

"Oh..." He blinked some more, "That's... that's very cute..."

Jean giggled next to him and her arm wound its way around his back, rubbing circles, "Isn't it? Mischievous peas in a pod, those two."

Jean's tone held a fondness that felt like warmth incarnate.

Diluc hummed. And he found himself finally relaxing somewhat.

Albedo appeared a short moment later with a small plate, "Would you like butter? Or jam? Or just bread?"

"Butter please..."

Albedo nodded and spread some from a little packet over two slices.

“Thank you...” Diluc took the plate gratefully.

Jean helped steady it as his hands shook.

Albedo’s smile pinched a bit as he watched Diluc struggle, but the expression remained genuine, “You are very welcome, Master Diluc. How do you feel?”

Diluc grunted as he shoved a bite in his mouth, “Y’want an honest answer, a polite answer, or a creative answer?”

He shoved another bite in his mouth. He was suddenly *very* hungry, holy shit-

Albedo blinked. Then he chuckled a bit, “Hmmm I am quite tempted to request the creative answer.”

Diluc smirked as he finished off the first slice at near record speed, “Let me think...”

He thought for a moment, then took a swig of water when Jean offered it.

“I think... I feel...” Diluc leaned a little further into Jean, “Kind of stupid for starters... I think half my brain might have died in the electro explosion...”

Albedo’s eyes widened, “Electro-?” He cleared his throat, then blinked quite a lot, “I see.”

Jean rubbed Diluc’s back just a smidge more vigorously, and Diluc realized that he really hadn’t told anyone *anything*-

He felt his expression wither.

Albedo cleared his throat again, “Perhaps, um-” His gaze darted to the bed, then to Jean, then back to Diluc, “Perhaps the two of us should speak privately. Would that be alright, Master Diluc?”

Diluc swallowed, “Um... okay...”

The only relief he could find lay in the fact that the alchemist didn’t try to call him ‘Master Ragnvindr’... Most knights who didn’t know him personally did, so it was a pleasant change of pace-

“Do you think we can get him to another room?” Albedo turned to Jean, “I really don’t-” He worked his jaw, “I would prefer not to involve Kaeya until absolutely necessary...”

*Foreboding...*

It made Diluc wonder what Albedo knew.

Odds were good that...

The bread was suddenly sitting *very* strangely in his stomach.

Jean sighed, then turned to Diluc. Her expression was concerned behind a smiling mask. It wasn’t nearly as pretty as before... It was too tight around the edges- “Are you up to try, Diluc? Albedo just has a few questions, that’s all. Nothing major.”

Diluc swallowed, “Yeah... I got that much...”

Jean worked her jaw and nodded. Then she chewed her lip, “We’ll help you walk...”

Diluc nodded.

~~~~~

“Alright, first things first-” Albedo closed the door gently behind Jean as she left. Which wasn’t comforting-

He then moved to a cabinet and pulled out another blanket.

With a smile (that Diluc couldn’t find it in himself to return), Albedo tucked it around Diluc’s lap. He was sitting in a cushy armchair, similar to the one in Kaeya’s room.

His breath labored. Walking was... had been very tiring...

Albedo perched himself on the bed in front of him, “How are you feeling? Truly?”

Diluc blinked. He swallowed.

Albedo held out yet another glass of water. He must have gotten it while Jean was maneuvering Diluc into the chair...

Diluc took it and held it in shaking hands. His mouth was dry, but he couldn’t bring himself to drink.

He kind of had to pee a little bit, actually, but getting to the bathroom would be a whole new gauntlet to tackle-

“Bad.”

Albedo nodded, “Succinct.”

Diluc grunted.

Albedo chuckled, “I could use a bit more information, though, Master Diluc. Please, feel free to give the ‘creative answer’ you offered earlier-”

“What do you know.” Flat. Would have been somewhat threatening, if Diluc could have mustered the energy for it.

Albedo grimaced.

Then the man sighed, “Alright. Let’s... ease your anxiety first, then.” He cleared his throat lightly into his hand. He straightened, and his tone was suddenly all business as he pulled a small notepad out of his pocket and began reading, “Your statement, regarding the dead treasure hoarders up near the Stormbearer Mountains, the retrieval of Cavalry Captain Kaeya’s vision, and your obvious involvement there-in-”

Diluc’s hands shook.

He dropped the water glass-

“Ah-” Albedo stiffened. He set his notepad aside, and quickly began picking up the shattered pieces- “Just... alright, let’s-”

Diluc flinched a bit as the alchemist came close.

Albedo leaned away slowly.

Then he started muttering and mumbling to himself- “Extreme reaction... Clear post traumatic stress... possible residual reaction to excessive electro-”

“W-What-”

Albedo blinked, still kneeling in the water puddle, “Huh? Sorry- I am very bad at this-” He stood with a pinched smile, “I am going to get a towel and clean this. And then I will tell you the plan.”

“P-Plan?!”

What is going on-

Am I getting arrested or not-?

This was the first time he’d pulled something this extreme since coming home. And while before he could just cut and run, now he was *home*, which meant...

*Oh fuck... I am royally **fucked**-*

Potential consequences for murdering like, five people hadn’t been on his mind with his brother hanging onto life by a thread.

But now it was truly dawning on Diluc that he really did charge into the woods like some sort of barbarian and murder like, *five people*-

Wait, it might have only been three-

THAT’S STILL BAD!

I wonder if the rescue mission itself counts, because if so-

“Yes, plan.” Albedo nodded once, vigorously, “You sit tight and don’t say anything. I’ll clean this, try to relax.”

Diluc felt his entire body clench up even more. The picture of whatever the opposite of ‘relaxed’ would be called-

Oh, stressed. Right, the opposite of relaxed is stressed-

“Stars, Master Diluc- please don’t have a heart attack or something-” Albedo stood there, expression suddenly *extremely* worried, and still holding broken glass in his bare hands- “Your body is already under considerable stress as is, and a cardiac event could be devastating-”

Could be?!?

“I can’t control whether or not I have a heart attack!” The confusion actually cut through some of the panic, oddly enough, “Why do you think I’m going to have a heart attack?!”

“You just said you were electrocuted! Humans tend to have heart problems after instances of electrocution-”

‘Humans’...?

Diluc's entire face scrunched, "Oh... kay... I guess that makes sense..."

It doesn't. Not really.

Albedo nodded. Then he seemed to remember that he was holding broken glass, "Um. I'm going to clean-"

"Okay..."

—

"Right." Albedo sat once more on the bed after tossing the wet towel into a basket.

Diluc kept his jaw clamped tightly shut.

Albedo flipped through his little notebook- "Where was I-"

"My statement on dead treasure hoarders."

Albedo's eyes narrowed, "I thought I told you not to talk."

What.

"Uh... sorry..."

Albedo huffed, "Your statement. Regarding the dead treasure hoarders up near the Stormbearer Mountains, the retrieval of Cavalry Captain Kaeya's vision, and your obvious involvement there-in is as follows-"

"What?"

Albedo cleared his throat forcefully, "YOUR STATEMENT." He made unwavering eye contact.

Diluc blinked first.

Albedo huffed once more, then started from the top. Again- "Your statement regarding the dead treasure hoarders up near the Stormbearer Mountains, the retrieval of Cavalry Captain Kaeya's vision, and your obvious involvement there-in is as follows:

'I was searching the camp in direct consultation with both Investigative Captain Albedo and Acting Grandmaster Jean Gunnhildr for the missing vision of Cavalry Captain Kaeya Alberich.

After about an hour... maybe two... the exact timeline is a little fuzzy I apologize-'

"Wait-" Diluc waved his uninjured hand as he interrupted, "Is this in *my* voice? Are you apologizing *for* me, or-"

"Master Diluc." Albedo stared. It was a little disconcerting, "This is *your* statement regarding events after we parted ways-"

"What about the rescue mission itself-?"

"Could I please finish? Please?"

Diluc sank back into the chair and nodded.

Albedo cleared his throat and continued. He didn't start all the way at the beginning again, thank

the stars-

‘After an hour or so searching the camp, I caught traces of cryo leading into the woods.

I followed a short ways, intending to report back before going too far, when I was knocked unconscious from behind.

It’s all incredibly fuzzy after that, but I will do my best to-’

“Albedo, what is going on here?!” Diluc was... extremely uncomfortable at the current moment.

Albedo just... stared at him. Again.

“I am.” Albedo spoke slowly, his tone extremely insistent, “Reading your statement back to you. For posterity.” Albedo continued staring.

Diluc’s face scrunched and his heart skipped a couple beats. Maybe he *was* going to have a heart attack after all, because he didn’t remember giving any statement-

It all clicked a fraction of a moment later.

Diluc felt his shoulders relax, “Oh.”

Albedo’s eyebrows rose, “Oh?”

“Um...” Diluc licked his lip. Then he fidgeted and pulled the blanket up around his shoulders. It was pretty cold in the room, “I hit my head... I mean- they hit my head... I’m... I’m just a little confused, I apologize...”

Albedo finally relaxed, and his features smoothed, “It is quite alright, Master Diluc. I will make a note of it in the follow up section.”

Diluc grunted.

Albedo continued.

‘I regained consciousness much further up the mountain. They hadn’t taken my vision for some reason... perhaps I am lucky in that regard...’

I don’t know that I talk like that...

*No, I **wouldn’t** talk like this for an official report-*

Diluc decided not to interrupt-

‘I fought back. It was loud... Everything was loud.’

Albedo cleared his throat, “Anything to add in regard to the fight? You seem to remember that electro was involved.” Albedo prodded gently.

It seemed the report wasn’t quite as finished as the alchemist had implied.

“Um...” Diluc swallowed as he kind of burrowed further into the blanket, “I uh... I came to and...”

Albedo nodded.

Diluc continued, “I... fought off one with a knife- I mean they had a knife...” He held up his

stitched wrist in explanation, "He uh- or she... maybe?"

A little confusion wouldn't hurt.

He *was* concussed, after all.

Albedo nodded, this time with a small smile.

"Um. They were the first to notice I was awake..." Diluc swallowed, "But then I... then I saw the one... the one that stabbed Kaeya... and he still had Kaeya's vision on him-"

Albedo frowned.

Diluc blinked.

Right. Victim.

"I tried to..." Diluc sighed. His brain really was mush at the current moment... this wasn't going to be all that difficult to sell, "I tried to get away. I summoned a lot of fire..." His face scrunched, "It... wasn't really on purpose to be perfectly honest..."

Another nod.

That part isn't even a lie...

Diluc stared through the floor, "A potioneer must have... electro... there was an explosion. The next I woke... the next I *remember* waking, the man who tried to kill Kaeya was dragging me toward the cliff. I fought back."

Diluc's cheeks felt hot.

"Go on."

Diluc sighed, "I hurt him... he dropped my broth- Captain Kaeya's vision. There was... I don't remember much after that, I'm sorry... I know he fell but... I-"

"I understand. He tried to throw you over and you fought him off. He fell instead."

Sure... yeah... We'll go with that.

"I... I think so... I managed to burn him... I think he lost his balance after that..."

Albedo nodded, "And how did you manage to make it back into the city?" His head tilted, waiting.

"Um... I walked?"

"With those injuries?" Albedo gestured at... Diluc's whole body.

Diluc snorted, "That's honestly what happened, Captain Albedo. I genuinely walked back. With these injuries." He held up a finger, "Oh! I made a tourniquet with my belt- for my arm."

He held up the injured arm once again. In illustration.

Albedo's eyes widened, "Wait, you really didn't get a ride, or have help-" He blinked, "Don't answer that."

"I've been told I lack self-preservation instincts."

Albedo snorted as he made little notes, "I'm not adding that."

Diluc felt his features relax, "Probably just as well..."

He watched as Albedo continued to scribble very quickly.

"Um..." Diluc licked his lip, "Why are you... Why are you helping me? Can I ask?"

"I'm not." Albedo flipped his little book closed, "I'm simply taking a statement."

"Albedo... Er- Captain?"

"Just Albedo is fine, Master Diluc. The formalities aren't necessary."

Diluc nodded, "Just Diluc is fine as well, then..."

Albedo smiled.

Diluc fidgeted, uncomfortable.

"Kaeya means a lot to me. And to my baby sister as well."

Diluc's head snapped up at the statement.

"And you mean a lot to Kaeya." Albedo's head tilted, "Does that answer your question?"

Diluc swallowed thickly. He hummed.

"He has missed you terribly these past years. You are aware of that, yes?"

Diluc looked away.

"I am glad that you seem to have missed him as well. That the hatred he thought you harbored appears to simply be... some sort of misunderstanding-"

Diluc winced.

Albedo sighed, "If you disappear again. And I don't necessarily mean in terms of outright leaving-" The alchemist searched for eye contact that Diluc couldn't give. Albedo worked his jaw, disappointed, "If you abandon him again, it will wreck him. And I can tell from our interactions the past few days that you do not truly wish to see him hurt."

Diluc grunted.

"I just..." Albedo sighed, "I obviously don't fully understand the situation. And Kaeya *claims* the blame is entirely his-"

That... hurt to hear...

That *really* hurt to hear-

Diluc felt his entire chest constrict. Breathing was suddenly more than a little bit difficult, and his eyes were feeling very prickly-

"But you very clearly love each other, so perhaps it is time to act like it."

Harsh, but true.

“I would tend to agree...” Diluc mumbled to the dust bunnies in the corner.

He wondered who hired the cleaning crew, because they really were doing a *terrible* job-

“Good.” The smile was evident in Albedo’s tone, “Now, I think you should get some more rest. That was... admittedly a much more stressful interview than I intended. I apologize.”

Diluc grunted in response.

~~~~~

## Chapter End Notes

Happy birthday to Kaeya!

feel bad that this is more of a Diluc-centered chapter, but it is what it is ˘(˘)˘/

I actually have a lot of this written ahead, it just needs a good scrubbing and some polish

I don't really know when I'll post, though, sorry. real life is a little too stressful rn for me to try to come up with an actual schedule for this atm.

## Chapter 9

### Chapter Notes

adorable fluff in the first half, Kaeya gets sick in the second- par for the course, really

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

#### *Diluc*

Diluc hobbled back into Kaeya's room with help from Jean.

Albedo had gone ahead to attempt to wake his rambunctious little sister with as little fuss as possible.

Diluc watched with amusement as the child closed her eyes tight. After very obviously opening them.

She was trying to pretend like she was still asleep.

It was less than effective.

The only real concern was the way her tiny arms tightened around Kaeya's trunk as Albedo tried to coax her into cooperating.

Kaeya's face scrunched in discomfort, but he managed to not make a sound.

"Klee..." Albedo's voice was stern, yet soft, "You need to be gentle. We already told you that Kaeya's hurting-"

The child's eyes flew open, and her grip immediately slackened.

Kaeya, meanwhile, frowned- "I-It's alright if she stays, Beetle-"

Albedo shook his head, "She has another lesson before bedtime." He turned to the girl, and his tone turned somewhat admonishing, "A lesson in which we are already behind because..." His voice turned upward like a question. Waiting.

The child pouted and whined, "Because Klee snuck off to go fi-" The child stumbled over her words as if trying to catch herself. Her gaze found the mattress- "... because Klee snuck off yesterday..."

"That's right. And I think it's time both Kaeya and his brother got some proper rest anyway-"

"Brother?" Klee sat up. By putting her weight directly on Kaeya's stomach-

Diluc winced.

Kaeya wheezed.

And Albedo's eyes widened as he quickly scooped the small child off the bed.

A breeze danced through the room, and Kaeya's pained expression relaxed.

"Yes, brother. Master Diluc over here is Kaeya's big brother," Albedo mouthed a 'sorry' to Kaeya before turning to face Diluc, who was still more or less being propped upright by Jean.

Kaeya waved the alchemist off, still seemingly displeased at having the cuddlebug stolen, but not the least bit concerned for the fact that she'd just put her whole body weight directly on his stitches.

Stitches that were currently holding his intestines in place.

Diluc figured it was fair. The child *was* very cute after all-

He cleared his throat awkwardly and waved, "Um... Yes, hello. We met back when-"

"Klee didn't know you were *brothers* !" Spoken in that incredulous, overly enthusiastic way that only a child could manage while maintaining sincerity.

Diluc hummed, "Y-Yes. Kaeya is my little brother. I have been away for a while and... um..."

*Stars...*

*I've been back for over a year- the literal absence means nothing to a child at this point-*

"So you're *Klee's* big brother too!"

Diluc blinked, "Uhhh... sure!" He blinked some more, "That's uh... That can be what that means-"

Kaeya snorted from across the room as Klee made grabby hands for a hug-

Diluc blinked even more, and was about to lean forward to oblige, when Albedo pulled the child back-

"Nuh uh... hang on there, Kleebee," Albedo turned her in his arms to fully face him, then pointed to the bandages around Diluc's neck and face.

Diluc tried not to fidget in response.

"See those?"

"Band-aids!"

Albedo laughed, "Yes, and what do they mean?"

Klee blinked a few times, then her gaze darted to Diluc- "That... That big brother Diluc is hurting..." She frowned.

Albedo nodded, "So how do we hug?"

"Gently!"

"Right," Albedo set the child on her feet. She barely came in above Diluc's knee- "And what else do we do?"

"Ask!"

“Good girl,” Albedo gave her a little head pat.

Klee turned to Diluc- “Can Klee give you a hug?”

*Oh my gods-*

“Sure!” Diluc wasn’t certain he’d heard his own voice sound so chipper in years-

He had to restrain a grunt as the tiny red child threw herself at his knees.

He patted her head.

There wasn’t much else he could do, since he was fairly certain he would fall over if he tried to kneel for a proper hug.

And that he also probably wouldn’t be able to get up again if that happened. Like a turtle flipped onto its back-

As things stood, Jean was the main reason he was able to remain upright.

“Do you like fish blasting big brother Diluc?” Bright eyes blinked up at him, the picture of excitement-

“Do I- what?”

“Klee can teach you how to make bombs! You have a pyro vision so it’ll be easy!”

*Oh- you mean literally-*

Jean cleared her throat beside them, “Master Diluc doesn’t like fish blasting, Klee. Because it’s dangerous, and causes serious damage to the ecosystem and native species within it. Right big brother Diluc?”

Diluc blinked as the glare Jean sent him... kind of scared him a bit...

But then he thought ‘fuck it, I want this kid to like me-’

“Well... actually, I wouldn’t mind giving it a try-”

Klee gasped in obvious excitement.

Jean’s eye twitched.

Kaeya cackled, then groaned as the laugh was apparently painful.

And Albedo scooped the rambunctious child up and into his arms.

The alchemist’s expression was equal parts worried and amused- “Right, time for lessons-”

~~~~~

Kaeya

Kaeya fought not to cackle again.

It hurt too much, even if the situation *was* really funny-

Jean was... very obviously irritated after Albedo and Klee left.

And Diluc was actually contrite for once in his life.

Which was *hilarious*-

She threw a blanket at the redhead's face, when Diluc finally managed to sit stiffly on his little cot-

Kaeya snickered. And winced. Both at the same time-

"Oh I'm glad you find this funny, Kaeya. Considering you're the one who taught her to sneak behind my back in the first place-" Jean's hands found her hips.

Ah... guilty as charged...

He let an apologetic smile turn his lips upward-

"Keep that silver tongue in your mouth. I'm not in the mood." Jean plopped herself back in the armchair. She picked up her book, so all told she probably wasn't *actually* mad.

Kaeya bit his lip before he said something stupid that might change that.

Diluc hugged the blanket that had been thrown at him, "Um... I'm sorry... I didn't really mean..."

Kaeya snorted.

Jean simply rolled her eyes and sighed heavily, "Relax. I'm not actually angry. Barbatos above couldn't stop that child from wreaking havoc. It's not like your encouragement makes a meaningful difference."

Diluc hummed and fidgeted a bit, clearly still a smidge uncomfortable.

Then he turned to Kaeya, "So. You taught the kid to shirk authority?"

Kaeya blinked, "Uhh..."

Diluc chuckled, "Yeah. Sounds like something you would do."

Kaeya frowned, "Says the man who taught *me* to ignore rules. I distinctly remember you teaching me the best ways to sneak sweets and snacks out of the kitchens-"

Diluc waved a hand, "I don't know what you're on about-"

Kaeya scoffed, "Convinced *me* to sneak out in the middle of the night to jump from Barbatos' hands-"

Diluc turned away haughtily, "I have no idea what you're talking about-" His expression scrunched- "And you got over your fear of heights, did you not? That one was exposure therapy-"

"You *pushed* me!"

"You had a glider! You were fine!"

Kaeya scoffed and his mouth fell open, "Wow."

Diluc snorted. Then he scratched at the back of his neck sheepishly, "In hindsight... that one may have been a little rash..."

Kaeya laughed. He had to clutch at his stomach as it hurt, “A *little?*”

In truth, the whole endeavor had ended up being very fun- once the initial terror abated. And Kaeya probably wouldn't have jumped on his own- which would have left him the only child in Mondstadt afraid of heights.

And what kind of Mondstadtian was afraid of *heights*?

Child Diluc was right, it had to be done, honestly-

Diluc grimaced, then shrugged, “I'm a shitty brother. What do you want me to say?”

Kaeya blinked in surprise.

*Well I don't want you to say **that**. That's for sure...*

Kaeya had to force the amusement from before to remain on his face. Because Diluc's tone was... genuinely a bit despondent- “Nah... you're alright...”

Kaeya picked at a loose thread in the blanket, “Got me over my fear of heights, so...”

Diluc grunted, “Sorry, I...” He sighed, “Shouldn't have brought down the mood like that...”

Kaeya frowned, “I mean... I would rather know if you're upset, or sad, or... If a joke doesn't land you don't have to pretend like it doesn't bother you-”

Diluc scratched at his head and looked away.

“Wow.”

Both brothers turned to blink at Jean, who stood.

“You two are *excellent* at communicating!” She set her book aside, then clapped her hands together once, “So excellent at it, that I think I'm going to give you some privacy!”

She took purposeful strides toward the door.

Were you just... waiting for an opportunity-?

Then she turned back, and the... somewhat teasing expression was gone, “I think I'll actually go home for a while, in all seriousness. Do either of you want or need anything?”

Diluc looked down at his clothes, “Um... If you could stop by Angel Share and ask Charles to send some more comfortable clothes... I would appreciate it.” He fidgeted, “And also probably send word to the winery that we're both doing alright...”

Kaeya blinked, “Wait- have you not sent word- how long have you been here?”

“Adeline has personally visited, Kaeya. You slept right through it,” Jean gestured to the vase next to his bed, “She's the one who brought the flowers-”

“She did?” Now *Diluc* sounded confused.

Jean snorted, “Oh yeah. You were also unconscious.”

“Huh... I'm surprised she didn't bring food...” Diluc's face scrunched.

“I asked her not to,” Jean shrugged, “I figured the only thing crueller than making her not bring food, was to let her bring food that you couldn’t eat-”

Diluc’s scrunched expression turned into a full scowl, “There’s nothing wrong with my stomach-”

Kaeya glared, “Not *everything* is about *you* , Uncrowned King.”

Diluc huffed, expression suddenly sheepish- “Right... Fair...” The expression turned contemplative, “Wait... what day is it, anyway...?”

“I’m gonna guess Tuesday!” Kaeya squirmed a bit, “It feels kind of like a Tuesday-”

Diluc glared, “What does that even *mean*?”

“It’s Friday, actually. Adelinde visited yesterday, Elzer the day before, and-” Jean cut in before Kaeya could give a spiel about days and their vibes- “Congratulations, you’ve both slept the majority of about three days, give or take.”

That didn’t mean much to Kaeya, who was trying to figure out exactly when he was... how long he was...

Wait... It was Friday when I got the note- or Thursday?

He couldn’t remember exactly, and it made his skin crawl a little bit.

Jean turned to Kaeya, clearly waiting for... something.

Which meant she’d probably asked him something.

Likely while he was stuck in his head trying to do simple math-

“Huh?” His head was starting to hurt.

“Do you want me to bring you anything? From home?” Jean’s head tilted as she waited.

Kaeya blinked, then he pouted, putting on his best impression of a puppy-

“No.”

“I didn’t even ask for anything yet!” Shouting made him stiffen, and he clutched at his stomach.

You both started talking about food...

Jean waited, eyebrow raised.

Kaeya sighed. He’d already been given one stern talking-to about keeping his diet limited... he didn’t really want another- “I don’t need anything... get some rest, Jeanie...”

Jean snorted, then her gaze bounced between them, “Talk shit out, you two. Or I will be orchestrating a proper intervention.”

“Rude-” Kaeya was tempted to chuck a pillow at her as the door opened-

Then closed.

He huffed. Footsteps echoed, then faded as his grandmaster left.

“What were you going to ask her for?” Diluc didn’t seem the least bit insulted by the exchange, which Kaeya found annoying.

Kaeya huffed, “Real food. That soup Albedo brought was bland as hell and now I’m craving Adelinde’s chicken skewers.” He crossed his arms over his chest.

The IV pulled in one hand, and the other still felt pressurized like a balloon. A very tender balloon.

He uncrossed his arms.

“Oh. You can probably have...” Diluc frowned, “I mean, you’re doing really well, all things considered. And feeling hungry is a good sign-” His head tilted as he thought about it, “Although it was only a couple days ago that your stomach contents were spilling into your body cavity, so maybe you *should* be cautious-”

Kaeya’s face twisted, “Why do you have to word it like that?”

Diluc shrugged, then winced at the movement, “Is it inaccurate?” He huffed a light laugh as he brought a hand up to rub at his neck and shoulder, “I honestly thought you were going to ask for wine or something, with that mischievous look on your face. I think that’s why Jean got annoyed.”

That... hadn’t even crossed Kaeya’s mind, actually.

But it *did* shed light on exactly what Diluc thought of *him*-

Kaeya felt his expression flatten, “Yes. Because alcohol is a *great* idea right now.”

Diluc grimaced, “No one said it was a good idea-”

“RIGHT. Because *raging* alcoholic Kaeya Alberich couldn’t possibly go a day or two without his fix,” Kaeya glared, he was suddenly legitimately angry.

Because who the fuck did Diluc think he was? Being a judgmental prick and saying shit like that-

Diluc winced, “Okay, I...” He looked away, “I’m sorry... I shouldn’t have said that...”

“No. You shouldn’t have.” Kaeya huffed. He also looked away to stare out the window. He could almost see the stars twinkling, but the relative light in the room made them difficult to discern.

“Kaeya...” Diluc sighed.

Kaeya continued staring out the window. As in- he continued staring at his reflection in the window...

Bruises and scars.

And stitches.

Not much of a face left, really. At the end of the day...

Kaeya was starting to see why Jean was so adamant about the gentle foods. Because right now even those were sitting strangely-

“Kaeya can we please just...” Diluc shifted and the small cot creaked, “I don’t want to fight...”

Kaeya snorted, “That’s a first.”

The sneer of his reflection was ugly.

Diluc groaned.

Kaeya swallowed. The reflection swallowed.

He tried to focus on breathing.

His face was starting to feel hot.

His side ached-

And scared, scarred eyes stared back at him out of a mottled face.

He didn't recognize himself.

And it didn't help that he wasn't wearing his eyepatch. He *never* looked in a mirror without his eyepatch firmly fixed in place.

His friends assumed vanity.

His acquaintances assumed some sort of secret hidden behind the cloth.

Jean knew that Kaeya simply couldn't handle-

Another barely controlled breath.

It also didn't help that his cheekbones were practically poking through his flesh in a way he hadn't seen in his reflection since he was very, very small-

Diluc huffed behind him, "Look, I already said I was sorry for the comment-"

"I'm going to throw up."

"What-" The alarm was evident in his brother's voice.

Kaeya's breath stuttered. The child in the window's breath stuttered- "Lu, I feel sick-"

His ears started ringing as his breath kept coming in harsher and harsher- as his body felt wrong in every conceivable way.

Slightly offset. Out of focus.

Unaligned-

His reflection moved with him, but it *wasn't* him- that *couldn't* be him, dammit-

Sounds bumped and jostled around him.

And he was pretty sure he heard his brother curse-

And then hands pulled his shoulders away from the window to lean over...

His stomach constricted as he gagged.

The pain was hellish, despite the cocktail of drugs he knew for a fact he was on.

Diluc's hand rubbed his back, "You're alright, breathe..."

Kaeya whimpered.

What was especially stupid was that nothing was even coming up-

Until it was.

The broth didn't taste as good coming out as it did going in...

And it didn't really taste all that good going in, so...

"It's okay... it's okay..." Diluc perched fully on the bed next to him, one arm held the bucket, while the other held Kaeya's shoulders. Then Kaeya's forehead, in an attempt to get his hair back.

Sound buzzed.

Heat flushed Kaeya's face.

Misery.

But then it... settled.

Everything settled, but the pit of misery remained.

"Shh..."

Kaeya distantly noted Diluc's fingers running gently through his hair...

Mumbling things.

Silly things, sweet things, comforting things...

Things like 'I've got you', 'it'll pass', 'hang in there'...

Kaeya swallowed. His mouth tasted *horrible*- "Ow..."

Pathetic.

"Done...?" Gentle. Fingers brushing back his bangs.

Kaeya nodded.

Diluc hummed, and set the wastebasket aside, "Not much came up... Are you sure?"

He nodded again. Into his brother's shoulder. Because Diluc was still hugging him- even though Kaeya was disgusting and awful and had literally just puked-

Diluc sighed. Then he tilted Kaeya's head and gently wiped at his face with a towel-

"Shh... You're alright..." Diluc's warm hand on his forehead felt like a blessing. His brother pulling him back into a hug felt like another blessing- Diluc even rocked a bit. Which was extremely soothing- "Jean shouldn't have left... the strain of that couldn't have been good..."

"M'fine..."

His brother huffed, "Oh are you? Stabbed less than a week ago, can't keep food down- but you're

‘fine’ -”

Kaeya... sort of flinched. And let out an incredibly undignified whimper. His hand also tightened in his brother’s shirt. Which completed an all around convincing portrait of a pathetic, disgusting, mess-

“Sorry-” Diluc shifted, “I’m... I’m sorry...”

“S’fine...”

It wasn’t inaccurate...

His brother sighed, then shifted. Kaeya jumped a bit as a straw found his lips, "Little sips, K. Wash out the taste."

Kaeya cracked an eye open. He took a few small drinks as requested.

"Better?"

Kaeya could only hum in response. He didn't have any energy for much else.

Diluc sighed again, “I’m going to get a nurse-”

“N-No...” Kaeya whined, “I’m alright...”

Please don't leave me...

“Kaeya, you... you can’t be throwing up like that. You still have stitches in- in fact they should probably *check* the stitches-”

Kaeya clung a little tighter.

Diluc stopped talking.

Kaeya waited for his heart rate to settle. It felt a little like a panicky baby bird in his chest.

Any energy from earlier had been bled right out of him...

“How long ago was it that you ate? Was it too much food in general? Too much spice-?”

Kaeya grunted.

He was... too tired for this...

Diluc sighed heavily, then his expression lightened as his fingertips turned Kaeya’s chin, “Let me get a nurse... please, Kaeya? I promise I’ll hobble right back as quickly as I can.”

Kaeya huffed.

“I’m fairly certain Barbara is on duty. I’ll ask for her, specifically.”

Kaeya made darting eye contact, then mumbled out a soft, “Okay...”

Barbara was basically family.

Barbara would be... it would be good if Barbara came... make certain he was actually alright...

“Lu...?”

Diluc shifted, preparing to stand, “Hm?”

“Can um...” Kaeya licked his lip, “Could you close the blinds before you go... please...?”

Diluc’s gaze darted to the window, then his brow furrowed for just a fleeting moment- it settled back into a smile, “Of course. Hold tight. I’ll be back in a moment.”

~~~~

## Chapter End Notes

Jean leaves and sh\*t just immediately goes south then the breaks

\*I\* get nauseous when I'm super stressed so now Kaeya does too lmao  
(poor guy also had a hole stabbed through his stomach so yaknow)

## Chapter 10

### Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

#### *Kaeya*

Barbara hummed softly as she poked and prodded at Kaeya's stomach and side.

After... helping him change into a clean shirt... and replacing the bedsheet...

He tried not to wince. Both from embarrassment and pain.

"Alright, ready for magic?" Barbara's head tilted. Her curls bounced, "Or do you need a minute?"

"Um..." Kaeya felt his brow furrow, "Is something wrong, or...?"

*More wrong than having a hole through your gut...?*

"Not that I can tell! But with a little healing magic I'll have a better idea of what's going on internally!" Barbara's voice was chipper.

So Kaeya figured he probably wasn't dying. Probably.

"Oh. Jean usually just... does it..."

Barbara huffed out a small laugh, "Jean uh..." The girl tapped her chin in thought, "Is more of a field medic, to be honest. If it's not an emergency, I like to have as much input from my patient as possible!" Barbara's smile gleamed.

It was all a nice way of saying Jean dove face first into healing in the same way she dove face first into everything: aggressively, and with little hesitation.

She saw a path, and she took it.

Kaeya hummed.

Jean wasn't a doctor. Or a nurse. Not in the true sense. She knew a lot- had studied healing and medicine fairly extensively.

But Barbara was right, Jean was a field medic. He was fairly certain she was only leading his recovery because... well, because it was *him*. Because she knew him- all of his triggers and fears and hang ups.

For better or worse, she knew him.

Barbara was the only other healer he would even *consider* letting near him (not that he had much say when he was unconscious). And even so he sorely wished Jean were present.

Kaeya felt bad when it became obvious that the girl could tell as much-

Her head tilted, and her eyes softened, "It's really okay if you're not comfortable with it, Kaeya," Her hands clasped behind her back, "It would largely be in an excess of caution anyway, as you seem fine, generally speaking. Your wound isn't irritated, there is no lingering nausea, and your

eyes and mind are clear, right?"

Kaeya nodded.

"No blood in the vomit?"

Kaeya's expression scrunched as he shook his head.

Barbara smiled, and gestured with a hand before continuing, "No fever, no dizziness, pain is consistent and..." An eyebrow quirked, "Bearable? I hope?"

Kaeya snorted, "I'm fine so long as I don't move..."

"Good!" Barbara hummed, then perched in the arm chair, "The only thing is... if you're having trouble keeping food down, then that means the IV will have to stay in a little longer."

Kaeya sighed, then rubbed tiredly at his eyes, "I didn't realize you were thinking of taking it out..."

Barbara nodded, "If you felt ready, yes. You've been doing fine with liquids, so everything seemed on track to try orally ingested medicine. If you reacted well, then the IV would be unnecessary." She huffed, "Unfortunately, having trouble with food means it needs to stay. Both for vitamins and electrolytes, and because it's a strong sign that you might not keep pills down."

Kaeya hummed. He picked at his fingernails, "And if uh... If throwing up had nothing to do with the food...?"

The girl's brow furrowed, "How do you mean?"

"I um..." Kaeya swallowed, "I sometimes... um... I get really nauseous sometimes... when I'm stressed... I'd eaten over an hour prior from... when I got sick... and was fine until..." He petered off, weirdly somewhat embarrassed.

"Oh. I see. Hmm..." Barbara chewed her lip, "Are you still feeling stressed?"

"N-No..."

"Is..." Barbara sighed, and her brow furrowed even further, "Is your brother the one making you feel stressed?" She leaned forward to rest a gentle hand on his shoulder, "It's okay to need space, Kaeya."

Kaeya scowled. He turned away to stare at the corner.

Barbara had made Diluc wait outside the room.

Now he understood why...

"You've been uh... sitting there waiting with that one, huh...?" Kaeya worked his jaw.

Barbara grimaced, "Captain Kaeya..." She sighed, "I'll not lie. It's not... a secret that many of us here were... surprised by his insistence to stay-"

"I asked him to stay." Kaeya felt a little bad for interrupting. But he really wanted the record straight- "He has offered to leave multiple times. I want him here." Kaeya continued staring through the floor tiles. They were, surprisingly, a little dirty- "Any insistence on his part is a uh... we'll say an extension of my own insistence."



Barbara's shoulders relaxed, and her smile grew. Almost as if she were relieved. Which in turn made Kaeya feel relieved- "I see. Would you like to talk about what had you stressed, then? And if talking doesn't help, then there are some medicines we could try next to alleviate anxiety."

Kaeya hummed, "Um... I uh..."

He didn't actually want to talk about it... He got enough shit from people for being vain on a good day...

"If you would prefer to talk with Jean, that is also an option." Barbara squeezed his shoulder, "She is your primary caretaker at the moment, after all. I'm just stepping in while she gets some rest."

Kaeya hummed again. Then he sighed. He decided to go ahead and bite the bullet, "My reflection freaked me out... I was feeling fine until I caught... until I saw what I look like... in the window."

Even still, Kaeya avoided letting his gaze drift in that direction. Despite Diluc having drawn the curtains tight before leaving.

Barbara frowned, then hummed as well- "It can be jarring. Especially with stitches." She sighed, "I've found it tends to be worse when you're not conscious while at first being treated, as well. Makes it a bit of an unpleasant surprise."

Kaeya hummed, "Yes, I didn't... realize how bad I look, I guess..." He fidgeted with the blanket in his lap.

"You don't look bad, Kaeya. You look bruised. They will heal quickly, and scarring should be minimal."

Kaeya winced, despite appreciating the answer. He let out a flat, "Thanks..."

Barbara sat further forward on the chair, then she gently took Kaeya's uninjured hand in her own, "Everything you're feeling is perfectly normal, Kaeya. There is no need for guilt, or shame. This entire experience has to have been very difficult for you, in multiple ways. It's okay to not be okay."

Kaeya blinked. Then he looked away as his eyes pricked.

Because he really wasn't okay, was he?

He was getting better, he had survived. But he wasn't... *good*-

Barbara squeezed his hand, "You'll be alright, Kaeya. And keep in mind, we're all here with you every step of the way!" Her smile practically glowed, "Me, Jean, your brother, we're all here!"

Kaeya huffed out a soft laugh. Coming from anyone else, the mushy sentiment may have been annoying. Would have likely come across as ingenuine.

But Barbara made it work.

Barbara made it sound legitimately comforting.

"Thank you..."

The healer stood, and when she leaned forward for a hug, Kaeya happily obliged.

"Of course. Now, be sure to let me, or any of the nurses know if you need anything, okay?"

Barbara pulled back, but not completely out of the hug, “Food, medicine, or even just some extra company- that’s what we’re all here for, alright?”

Kaeya nodded. Then he smiled, “You’re... you’re very good at this Babs. I’m proud of you.”

The girl blinked. Then a light blush tinged her cheeks- “O-Oh- I’m only-”

Kaeya laughed.

It was ironic, the way those who were the best at putting others at ease- at doling out compliments, love, and reassurance- were often the worst at receiving it-

“Jean’s very proud of you too. Says as much at least once a day-”

The light blush turned to a veritable inferno- “R-Really?!”

Kaeya forced his smile to remain. He’d have to remind Jean to praise her sister directly more. Singing Barbara’s praises to others didn’t cut it. The two needed to talk face to face more often-

“Absolutely. Ask anyone at the Ordo. She’s *insanely* proud of you.”

Barbara’s smile grew even more vibrant. Which hadn’t seemed possible half a second ago- “Oh- That- That makes me very happy! Thank you for telling me Captain Kaeya!”

~~~~~

Diluc

Diluc straightened immediately when the door to Kaeya’s room opened-

Then his shoulders relaxed almost as quickly, when he took in the cheerful demeanor of the young healer.

“Everything appears alright, Master Diluc! He’s doing quite well, all things considered,” Barbara smiled. Diluc wasn’t certain, but the expression appeared much warmer than it had earlier.

She must be feeling just as relieved as I am...

“Do... do you know why he was ill, then? Or is it just how things are sometimes... with injuries such as this?” For someone who got hurt as often as Diluc, he really wasn’t all that knowledgeable beyond basic field medicine...

“Ah... That is undoubtedly part of it...” Barbara’s eyebrows pinched ever so slightly, “However, he also told me he was stressed. And that strong feelings of anxiety occasionally make him ill, even under better circumstances.”

Diluc felt his expression wither. But before he could sink down too far into his own self loathing, Barbara continued-

“He caught sight of his reflection, and found his appearance distressing. It’s... not uncommon with facial injuries- especially considering how severe some of the bruising is. And stitches are never a pretty sight, especially when left to air out a bit, as his were. I patched that up with a bandage, and am getting him an eyepatch now-”

Diluc frowned. He... probably should have considered the eyepatch...

It wasn't like Kaeya ever went out in public without it...

The guilt came back.

Because Kaeya wouldn't need the eyepatch at all if Diluc hadn't-

"Master Diluc?" Barbara's head tilted, "Are *you* feeling alright?"

Diluc grunted. Then rubbed at his temple, "I've... been better..."

Barbara nodded, then reached out and gave his arm a gentle squeeze, "Pain?"

"N-No..."

Not physical pain, at least...

Barbara nodded once more, then offered another smile, "You should sit with him. He's made it very clear that your presence brings him considerable comfort."

Diluc blinked. Kaeya himself had... only come *just* short of saying as much himself, but hearing it stated so plainly still felt like a surprise. And a bit of a gut punch...

He hummed.

"Master Diluc..." Barbara sighed, "I know... I know the past few weeks have been rough for you as well... especially the past few days... And it's a lot to ask, but..." The girl picked at her thumbs, suddenly unsure of herself, "I'll... be blunt: he needs you, and... It would be a great comfort to me... and I know to my sister as well if you could... *be* there for him... long term...?"

Translation: Please don't cut and run after this.

Again.

Diluc winced-

"I don't-" Barbara waved her hands in front of herself in distress- "I just mean that recovery is going to be a long, nonlinear process, and he needs and deserves support-"

Diluc sighed. He couldn't help the way his shoulders curled, "I've no intention to go anywhere, Barbara..."

The healer nodded, "Th-Thank you... I'd um..." She suddenly didn't seem keen on eye contact- "I'd better find him a comfortable eye patch..."

She left Diluc to his guilt.

—

"So you got so stressed you puked." Diluc closed the door gently behind himself.

Kaeya scowled at him, "I see we're not in the mood to let this go..."

Diluc smirked, "Depends, are you going to hurl on me again if I tease you a bit?"

Kaeya huffed. He looked away in clear, miserable embarrassment.

"Alright... sorry..." Diluc sighed, "I'm done..."

He sat stiffly in the armchair next to the bed and fidgeted a bit. Somehow, the fresh tunic Barbara brought him was even scratchier than the last one-

"I'm sorry..." Kaeya picked at his thumbnail, still refusing eye contact- "I- that was, uh... really gross of me..."

Diluc raised an eyebrow, "Right. Because you've never thrown up on me before."

Kaeya had... an *extremely* sensitive stomach when he was a child. Especially the first year or two he'd come to live with them.

Kaeya got sick often enough when they were little that Diluc learned quickly not to be squeamish.

Kaeya grumbled, and his cheeks warmed enough from embarrassment that Diluc could note the color despite the bruising.

He sighed, "It's alright, Kaeya. *I'm* sorry for stressing you out enough to-"

Kaeya fidgeted. He made eye contact after settling, "I wasn't... upset because of you... I... my injuries freaked me out, it wasn't what you said about the alcohol..." Kaeya swallowed and worked his jaw, "First time getting stabbed is bound to create some... stress..."

Diluc's head tilted, "This is your first stabbing?"

Distract him, go-

"Yeah... why?" Kaeya's face scrunched, "I mean... people have *tried* to stab me before, but like, I was under the impression that zero stabbings was a normal amount of stabbings-"

"I was stabbed twice by the time I made captain. You're slacking."

Kaeya snorted. He clutched his stomach as it almost became a full laugh, "S-Stop, Lu... I can't... I can't laugh too much..."

Success.

Diluc hummed. He felt his face relax almost into a smile, "Sorry..."

Kaeya took a deep breath, and fidgeted once more in an attempt to get comfortable.

Diluc worked his jaw, "Kaeya?"

"Hm?" Kaeya had laid back with his eyes closed.

"Would..." Diluc felt his brow furrow. He worked his jaw.

Kaeya's eyes cracked open and his head tilted, "What's up, Diluc?"

Diluc blew out a breath, "How would you feel about living at the winery?"

Kaeya blinked.

Diluc didn't.

Diluc also didn't breathe.

He waited for his impulsive question to backfire and blow up in his face.

But... what better way to make absolutely certain that he could 'be there' for Kaeya (as multiple people have now requested, mind), than to live in the same house again?

And with the winery staff, Kaeya would be well cared for- and well guarded too, seeing as they still didn't know who had it out for him, and-

“You're... serious?” Kaeya's brow furrowed, “Truly?”

Diluc nodded.

His jaw was clenched too tightly for actual words.

“Did...” Kaeya's tone was measured. He worked his jaw, “Did Adelinde put you up to this...?”

It was Diluc's turn to blink in surprise, “N-No, but you and I both know she would approve-”

“Elzer?”

Diluc's shoulders slumped, “Kaeya...”

*You could give me **some** credit here-*

“What?” His little brother's face scrunched, “Was it Connor?”

“NO ONE PUT ME UP TO IT-”

Kaeya flinched, “Okay! Geez!”

A beat passed.

Diluc tried to temper his hurt feelings behind a pout.

“Was it Moco?”

Diluc groaned and his head fell into his hands. Because that one was almost downright insulting- “I know I deserve this, but for Archon's sake...”

He massaged his temples. His head was starting to hurt pretty bad... it might have been about time for some more pain killers...

Well... even if he says no I'll just... crash on his couch or something...

Diluc didn't even... he didn't even know if Kaeya's apartment had a proper guest room.

He'd only been just inside the front door once or twice. And never for long...

He swallowed. He really had been horribly negligent...

“Lu...?” Kaeya's voice sounded small... “Are you, um... are you *actually* serious...?”

Diluc lifted his head to meet an... extremely anxious gaze.

Kaeya was wringing the absolute life out of the blanket in his lap. With his right hand, anyway. His left was still rather swollen, and even Kaeya's anxiety-ridden subconscious seemed smart enough not to use it.

Diluc sighed, “I am very serious, Kaeya... If you would like to live at the winery, I would...” He

blew out a deep breath, “I would very much like for you to come live at the winery. It can be temporary if... uh... if that’s better...”

Kaeya studied him, eyes sharp and discerning. Then his hand came up to rub at his right temple. Along the edge of his scar. His right eye closed as he huffed out a deep breath, “I would... Um... I would like that... also...”

Diluc swallowed in anxiety, “If... if you don’t actually it’s fine, Kaeya- I can-” Kaeya was rubbing at his eye now, and it made Diluc nervous- “I can also stay here in the city with you- I don’t mind taking a couch-”

Kaeya frowned, “I have a guest room, you know...”

That answered that question.

“Then I don’t mind borrowing your guest room-”

Kaeya’s frown cracked into a smile, “Inviting yourself over...”

Diluc worked his jaw, “Well... I’d rather not let you out of my sight. To be frank.” He rubbed at his neck and shoulder- at a particularly tender spot that was achey, and a little itchy- “We still don’t... We still don’t know who sold you out, or if they’re still after you...”

Kaeya’s expression dropped.

His gaze fell to his lap.

“Oh... right...”

Shit...

He was supposed to be helping his brother stay calm-

“The winery is better... safer...” Kaeya’s shoulders curled, “Probably...”

Diluc nodded, “That’s what I was thinking too.”

Kaeya shivered a bit.

“You alright?”

Kaeya shook his head. The heel of his hand pressed into his bad eye-

“Is it bothering you...?” Diluc shifted in discomfort.

Kaeya nodded. Then he looked away.

“Can I ask in what way...?”

How, exactly, did I hurt you...?

“Aches a bit... sometimes... Doesn’t... um...” Kaeya worked his jaw and shifted in clear discomfort, “I uh... I lied when I said... when I said I could see fine...”

I thought that might be the case... after actually seeing the scar...

Diluc nodded, “I’m sorry.”

Kaeya's expression was unreadable, "I know, Lu... it's not your fault..."

"How is it not?"

Kaeya glared, "It was an accident, Diluc. It's fine-"

"An accident." Diluc stared, "I swung my sword at you. Summoned fire. And you call it an *accident?!?*"

Don't yell-

Barbatos above, please make me stop yelling-

Kaeya glared, "I don't recall you swinging your *sword* as-" His jaw tightened and his eyes scrunched shut. He took a ragged breath-

"Kaeya, I'm-"

"I can't do this right now." More ragged breaths.

Diluc worked his own jaw. His voice croaked- "I'm sorry-"

"I *just* said I can't do this right now! So fuck *off!*" Kaeya's face screwed up. Pale, gaunt, and bruised- and suddenly very, incredibly angry...

So you aren't ready to forgive me.

Diluc nodded as he studied his little brother.

Kaeya's breathing was rough and uneven, and he was clutching desperately at his side. Whether from pain or pure anxiety Diluc wasn't sure, but he was hugging himself with his injured hand, which probably wasn't great. And he was still pressing the heel of his good hand roughly into his face... which also probably... wasn't great...

"Would you like me to get a nurse-?"

"Nurse just left." Venom laced the words.

Diluc, by contrast, forced a deep breath. He could play the part of the reasonable party- the contrite party. This was almost better, really. Kaeya had never expressed anger directly with him- at least not about their fight.

And... while they were still sort of dancing around the edges of things, this was... better. More comfortable.

Closer to how Diluc had been expecting- how part of him had been *wanting* Kaeya to react to him since his return.

Kaeya continued glaring, and Diluc realized he should probably say something-

"You're in pain. A nurse can bring you more medicine-"

"Barbara's coming back with an eyepatch. Come up with a better excuse."

Excuse...?

“A better...” Diluc frowned, “What do I need an excuse for...?”

And Kaeya scoffed, “To leave, obviously.”

Oh...

Diluc took another deep breath, “I’m not leaving, Kaeya. Not unless you want me to.” He spoke slowly, softly, “And when you are feeling a bit better- when you’re cleared to leave the Cathedral- I’ll still be here. And I’ll help you get home- whether to your place here in the city or to the winery, it’s your choice. And I’ll stay. As long as you’d like me to.”

Kaeya’s lip quivered.

And in this moment, he looked more like his baby brother than he had in years- but the scared version.

The scared version that Crepus had carried into the winery bundled in his own coat- shaking and bruised and far, *far* too thin for his age and height-

Diluc sighed and stood. He made his way to the bed- “Scoot over.”

Kaeya scooted over.

“C-Careful... IV...” Kaeya’s mumble was shaky at best, “Gets tangled...”

“I’ve got it,” Diluc maneuvered himself carefully onto the small bed.

It was apparently the right choice, because Kaeya immediately snuggled in close, with his head on Diluc’s shoulder. He was shaking.

“I love you, K...” Diluc pressed a gentle kiss into his brother’s hair.

Kaeya choked on a sob, and Diluc tried not to let it shatter what was left of his heart.

“Get some sleep. You’ll feel better with a little more sleep,” Diluc started carding gentle fingers through Kaeya’s hair. It had always been the quickest way to knock his little brother out, when he was a kid.

But Kaeya kept crying. Which wasn't the goal-

"Shh... it's okay... you're okay..."

"I'm s-sorry, Lu-"

"No... stop. None of this is your fault. *None* of this is or ever was your fault, so please don't-" Diluc choked a bit. He had to swallow thickly before he could continue.

He wasn’t sure what Kaeya was trying to apologize for. Their fight, or the current situation.

Either way he really didn’t want to hear it.

He hugged his brother a fraction tighter, "Please don't apologize to me, Kaeya..."

Kaeya hummed shakily- clearly trying (and failing) to reign in his tears.

“You can cry, K... I think trying to hold it back is doing more harm than good...” Diluc reached a

hand down to where his brother was doing his best to hide his face. He gently wiped at the tears on his left cheek, "It's okay..."

A sad, wet little laugh. Then something altogether surprising- "My father l-likely would b-beat the sh-shit out of me... c-could he see me now... so pathetic..."

Diluc couldn't help but stiffen, "... what? Kaeya, father would *never*-"

"Not *your* father, Lu..."

"Oh..." Diluc felt his jaw clench, "I see..."

"Not..." Kaeya let out a shaky sigh, "Not that he... didn't love me, but... it... crying doesn't help you survive... being weak isn't an option in... where..."

Diluc smoothed his brother's hair. He hummed.

It all felt like salt in a fresh wound.

"Let's not think of that right now. Right now you can cry, okay?" Diluc settled his cheek on top of his brother's head, "Right now crying doesn't make you weak."

Another sniffle, "Okay..." Another laugh, "S'not like I didn't cry as a kid anyway, huh?"

Diluc hummed.

"Unlearned that lesson pretty quick actually..." Kaeya shifted, "I was kind of a crybaby in the end... Really did dad proud..."

Diluc rolled his eyes, "You were a child. Children cry. Adults cry. It's perfectly normal."

"I didn't cry when Crepus died."

Diluc grunted.

"I don't think I felt much of anything when Crepus died..."

Diluc felt his face scrunch, "Well that's kind of a horrible thing to say-"

"What? No! Not! That's not what I meant-" Kaeya squirmed until they were making eye contact- "I- I mean in a numb way, I-"

Diluc huffed and pulled Kaeya back into the hug. He wasn't angry, and he didn't want Kaeya to think he was.

He knew how much Crepus meant to him, and that grief was often... strange...

Just consider how he *himself* had reacted to-

Kaeya relaxed, "I... It just... nothing felt real... for a long time..."

Diluc hummed.

"I think... I don't think anything was real again until Eroch went down..."

Diluc gritted his teeth.

“I felt a lot when we took Eroch down...”

Diluc nodded. He hadn't been here. He'd been...

I think... I was in Natlan...?

Yes, he'd been in Natlan at the time-

Diluc sighed, “I drank a toast... when I got your letter...” He ran another gentle hand through Kaeya's hair.

He found he didn't actually hate spiced rum as much as he'd expected. It was better than firewater, at any rate-

“Oh?” Something light finally leached into his brother's voice, “Did you now? How surprising...”

Diluc hummed, “Didn't want you to toast alone... even if I was a little behind, what with the lag in communication...”

Kaeya sighed, “Should've said so in your response... would've made me feel better...” There was a deep melancholy there. Something strange that Diluc was almost afraid to ask about, for some reason-

Back then Diluc had been... had still been too angry- too bitter. He couldn't...

He couldn't cut ties completely, but that also didn't mean he could... at the time... pretend like things were okay...

And it wasn't as if Kaeya had been completely forthcoming either. His brother had neglected to mention a lot of things in his own letters. Like the fact that he'd changed his name. That he'd forfeited his inheritance.

That he was half-blind...

Though... that one Kaeya did actually try to...

Diluc felt a chill run through him. He'd been so *sure* that Kaeya was lying- that Kaeya had been fucking with him to make him feel bad-

He'd been so sure that Kaeya would be the same when he got back...

That maybe somewhere along the line Elzer would write discussing how Kaeya had shown up to help run things in Diluc's absence...

Diluc hadn't 'officially' disowned Kaeya in any capacity- everything he'd shouted that evening *could* have remained between him, Kaeya, and the wind.

He hadn't expected... nor had he *wanted* Kaeya to actually follow through...

The bitterness he'd so long mistaken for anger and resentment showed its true colors as regret and guilt.

Diluc swallowed it. For now. He forced cordiality back into his tone.

“What do you mean, K? You should've been in decent spirits- having taken down an accomplice in our father's murder.”

Kaeya hummed, “Yes... best not to dwell...”

“I don’t know what that means, Kaeya-”

“That’s alright.” Curt.

(‘Drop it.’)

Diluc dropped it. He sighed, and shifted in an attempt to get more comfortable.

“How did you get hurt, Lu...?”

Back to present.

Probably for the best. The past was an unkind place, generally speaking.

“I hunted down the bastards who took your vision.” Diluc stared at the opposite wall as he spoke, “Most of them are... much crispier than I currently am.”

Kaeya snorted. Then in a small voice, “That... doesn’t make it better...”

Diluc grunted, “Sure it does. Makes *me* feel better, anyway.”

Kaeya huffed.

“You needed your vision, K... Don’t worry about it... I’m fine.”

Kaeya grumbled. Then he sighed. He practically deflated, really... “There was... one named Stefan... he... he’s the one who...”

“Dead at the bottom of a ravine.”

Kaeya hummed, “I see...”

Diluc waited, wondering how Kaeya might react...

“There was another named Jess. She... was also...”

“Jean took care of that one, apparently.”

Kaeya winced, “Oh...”

Diluc felt his eyes narrow, “Why? Did we need something from them-”

There were a few underlings left behind that I could probably hunt down-

“No, I- It’s-” Kaeya squirmed, “I don’t like it when Jeanie has to... it’s not right...”

That’s what you’re worried about...?

Diluc hummed. He didn’t argue though. Because it truly *didn’t* feel right. Jean was... good... Jean was gentle...

He sighed, “They had it coming. I don’t think Jean’s losing any sleep over it. And I know that I’m not either.”

Kaeya nodded, “Okay... I’m... I’m still sorry... either way...”

I already told you not to apologize.

Diluc hugged his brother a little tighter, “You don’t have to be. It wasn’t your fault.”

Kaeya grumbled, “Not entirely true-”

“Did any others know?” Diluc decided to cut the self-deprecation off.

“I don’t know...” Kaeya’s voice... floated a bit... he was getting upset. Although, to try and claim that he wasn’t already upset felt a little silly- “I was... very out of it a lot of the time, so I don’t know who told...” Kaeya trailed off with an exhausted sigh.

“That’s alright,” Diluc smoothed his hair gently, “Get some more sleep, we don’t have to talk about this right now-”

“How long was I gone, Lu...? I don’t actually know how long...”

“Kaeya-”

“Jean- Jean said today is Friday... a week...?”

Diluc felt himself stiffen a fraction. He couldn’t help it-

“Oh...” Kaeya deflated beside him, “Two weeks, then...?”

Diluc worked his jaw. His eyes pricked and his voice tightened, “There about... yeah... You... They had you for about a week and a half... a week and a few days... We’ve been in the cathedral for about three days... three and a half if you count the evening and night after we finally found you.”

That night had been multiple surgeries for Kaeya. And it had been a violent cacophony of pain, rage, and panic for Diluc.

It was good, in a way, that he’d been gone, though. Hunting for his brother’s vision had given him an important task, and an outlet for his rage and grief. Diluc would have truly gone insane had he been forced to simply sit on a pew in the waiting area.

You know, *waiting*.

He was a little insane anyway- if the trail of bodies was any indication. But it was bad enough just *knowing* how close Kaeya had crept to death (multiple times, apparently). Being there for it would have likely been the straw that broke... everything...

Kaeya hummed, “No wonder you personally came to get me... revenue at Angel’s Share must have been *plummeting* without your best customer-”

Diluc groaned. Because of course Kaeya was still salty about his earlier dig- “You and I both know that *Venti*’s my best customer.”

“Second best-”

“Nimrod and Stanley still have you beat, K. And I already said sorry for my earlier comment about-”

“I’m joking, Lu... I’m not actually mad...”

Diluc grumbled.

“I just need a distraction... because I don’t know how else to react to-” Kaeya choked on his words.

“Shh... you’re alright... it’s alright...” He continued smoothing fingers through his hair.

“They h-” Kaeya hiccuped, “They h-hurt me real bad, Lu...”

Diluc hummed. His hand continued its soothing motion through his brother’s hair.

“They kept h-hurting me and I thought they were going to kill me and then they didn’t and I just wished they would and-” The statement ended in a sob.

“You’re safe, Kaeya...” Diluc shushed him gently, “They’ll never hurt you again.”

The platitude didn’t seem to help as Kaeya continued crying.

*I will. Murder the ever-loving **shit** out of anyone who so much as looks at you funny I swear by every god-*

Diluc held him and waited- ready to listen if that was what Kaeya needed- if he needed to talk.

But his brother just kept crying-

And Diluc kept holding him. It was the only thing he could do, really.

He couldn’t go back in time and murder the treasure hoarders more dead. He couldn’t go back in time and stop this shit from ever happening.

The only thing he could do was... *be* here. Now.

So he did his best. He did his best to be a steady and comforting presence.

After a while...

After a while Kaeya settled... finally worn out.

“Try to sleep, K... you need all the rest you can get...”

Kaeya mumbled something altogether unintelligible- a perfect illustration of Diluc’s point.

It only took another moment for Kaeya’s breaths to smooth into sleep.

Diluc followed shortly after.

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## Chapter End Notes

me, the author: yesss cry! CRY!! mwahahahaha

(and that, friends, sums up my writing process)



# Chapter 11

## Chapter Notes

we're jumping ahead (at least) a few days

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

### ***Kaeya***

Kaeya ruffled his little sparknight's hair before pulling the brush through it.

He couldn't have stopped his grin if he'd tried as she tilted her head back to give him a smile that was made of pure radiant sunshine-

"Klee wants piggy tail braids, Kaeya!" Klee beamed expectantly.

"Ah..." Kaeya's own smile faltered- though only for a moment. His gaze darted down to the ruins of his left hand. It shook, so he balled it into as much of a fist as he could manage and shoved it under his quilt- "I'm afraid your brother will have to be your hairstylist for today little ladybug, my hands hurt a bit too much for anything other than brushing."

"Oh..." Her pout was... distressing.

Kaeya wasn't used to telling Klee 'no'.

She turned on the bed to better face him, and Kaeya had to bite back a wince as the movement jostled his knee.

It was in a compression brace at the moment. Jean and the other healers had ascribed it a much lower priority than his head, hand, and mostly-healed stab wound. Aside from icing it and checking to make sure something wasn't cataclysmically wrong, it had received minimal healing. That said, Kaeya didn't miss the way the healers' expressions would tighten each time they checked it...

Jean said they couldn't do or see much until the swelling went down, but that it would likely require surgery, at the very least.

The other healers, on the other hand, waffled like bad politicians whenever he asked for a proper prognosis...

He was starting to get angry.

Diluc was also obviously... fighting very hard to keep a tight rein on his own temper.

Kaeya wondered if part of the reason for the healers' almost... *hurried* visits were the absolute death glares Diluc would send their way when they started evading, or redirecting from the issue-

Jean begged for patience each time they left. Stating that it was extremely difficult to get a good and accurate reading on Kaeya's leg in its current state and that they simply didn't want to give him false hope *or* false worry.

Kaeya trusted Jean. So he let it go.

After this last visit, Diluc left to get some air. Said he wanted to check in at Angel's Share.

Kaeya didn't mind too much, Albedo and Klee were visiting after all so it wasn't like he was alone.

And... This last healer at least said things looked to be improving... so Kaeya might be able to leave by tomorrow at the earliest- assuming the man could get a decent read on his knee then...

It had been the best news he'd gotten yet in regard to that particular injury, so Kaeya was more than...

Kaeya was... at least sort of okay with it...

Klee's pout brought him back to the present. She picked up his uninjured hand and studied it closely. Then she noticed his other hand, which he was... kind of purposely hiding...

He sighed as she tugged at his left wrist. He relented with little fuss and let the child hold it.

"Be gentle, bug..." Kaeya forced as much relaxation into his posture as he could manage.

She'd already seen the injury, obviously. So he at least didn't have to worry about her getting freaked out, or disgusted, or-

Klee's pout grew even more pouty. Which Kaeya hadn't thought possible.

"It still hurts..." Klee's lower lip jutted out even further as her eyes grew glassy.

Kaeya blew out a weary sigh and wiggled his remaining fingers just a little bit for her- "Yeah... but it's getting better, see?" He leaned forward and nuzzled her nose with his own- eliciting a giggle from the child.

"Pretty soon I'll be braiding your hair again like normal, okay? So don't be sad, kiddo!" He leaned back a fraction with a smile, "I'm alright."

Klee's smile remained subdued, but she nodded, "Okay... And then we'll go fish blasting too, right?"

Kaeya grinned, "Oh, but of course!"

"And big brother Diluc will come?" Klee gripped the quilt in tiny, excited hands.

And Kaeya laughed, "If he wants to! He's very good at keeping secrets, so I think it'll be alright if he tags along."

Klee practically squealed. She bounced a bit in her excitement, and Kaeya had to place a firm hand on her shoulder to remind her that... to remind her that he was hurting...

He couldn't hide his grimace this time...

Klee immediately stilled, "Oh- Oh no, Klee's sorry-"

Kaeya shushed her immediately, "It's alright, I'm glad you're excited-"

Luckily his tight tone went largely unnoticed as the door handle turned.



“And who’s keeping secrets? Hm?” The door opened along with the teasing question, “Anything the Investigative Captain shouldn’t know about?”

Kaeya snorted as Albedo entered, a bag in each hand containing lunch for the three of them. He set them on the table and looked around, brow slightly furrowed.

Klee turned to face him, “We’re talking about fish blasting! Which you said is fine with you so long as we’re careful and out of your sight!”

Kaeya broke into a full laugh at that one-

Albedo blinked. And kind of grimaced, “I didn’t- I never said-”

“Yes you did!” Klee’s tiny hands found her hips as she sat up further- “You said it to big brother Kaeya! Klee remembers!”

Kaeya was certain that, had the alchemist been capable of it, he would have been blushing red like a tomato. His mouth opened and closed, and his glare turned to Kaeya-

Who shrugged, “Don’t look at me, it’s not my fault she’s gotten so good at sneaking and-”

“It absolutely *is* your fault, Kaeya.” Albedo scoffed, but there wasn’t much bite to it, “Teaching my sister to be naughty and eavesdrop-”

“Hey!” Klee’s voice pitched toward a whine, “Klee isn’t naughty! Klee didn’t even get caught! It’s only naughty if you get caught!”

Kaeya chuckled as his face dropped into a bit of a grimace, “Ah... admitting to the crime qualifies as getting caught, Klee.”

The child gasped, hands flying to cover her mouth as she turned back to face her Mentor in Naughtiness- “No!”

“Afraid so, bug.”

“Oh...” Klee’s finger found her chin as she thought. Kaeya could practically hear the gears turning in her head, but eventually the only response that came out of all that thinking was a flat and sheepish, “Oops.”

Kaeya laughed harder. It was actually enough to cause a small twinge of pain in his side-

“Alright you two, that’s enough conspiring for now-” Albedo stepped over with an eye roll and scooped his little sister up, depositing her in the chair closest to the bed, “We have a few options today. I have fisherman’s toast-”

Klee’s hand shot up- “Ooh! Ooh! Klee wants toast!”

Albedo chuckled then portioned a serving onto a small plate, “I never would have guessed.”

He handed the child her plate before turning back to the table, “And for Kaeya we have cream stew, chicken and mushroom skewers, or some cold cuts. I also fetched a pile-em-up for your brother, so if you’d like to mess with him you can take that.”

Kaeya chuckled, “Ah, but that plan only works if he’s joining us for lunch.”

Albedo’s head tilted, “Is he... not?” The suspicion was evident in his tone.

Kaeya sighed, “He went to check on Angel’s Share. I’ll be surprised if he’s back by dinner, to be frank.”

Albedo nodded slowly.

Kaeya’s face scrunched, “You’re being weird, Beetle- what’s on your mind?” He straightened, “Also, I’ll take the cold cut platter, please-”

Klee gasped, a bite of toast practically hanging out of her mouth- “Big brother Kaeya are you feeling okay? You *always* have chicken and mushroom!”

Kaeya blinked as Albedo handed over his requested dish, “I... had chicken last night, Klee. I’m fine, just... craving some variety at the moment.”

Klee hummed, and her eyes narrowed in suspicion as she shoved another bite of fish toast into her mouth. She was imitating them. Which was really cute because Klee’s ‘suspicious’ face matched Albedo’s very nearly to a tee- though it was a smidge more exaggerated.

Kaeya tried not to laugh. He turned back to Albedo as he took a bite of his food.

The Alchemist sat quietly after sorting and repacking the unpicked meals.

He apparently wasn’t hungry himself.

Kaeya tried to think if he’d ever actually seen Albedo eat, and... he was pretty sure he had... right?

Yes, he definitely had-

Kaeya restrained the sudden urge to ask the man if he even required food. He’d ask later, when Klee wasn’t around. He was fairly certain the child was still in the dark about her brother’s... nature.

So it wasn’t Kaeya’s place to bring it up in front of her-

“Kaeya. Your face is going to get stuck like that if you scrunch it any farther.”

Kaeya blinked up into a smug smirk on Albedo’s face-

He huffed and shoved more food in his mouth.

—

“Alright, off you go, Hertha will take you to your lessons-”

“But-” Klee reached back pathetically as the knight in question took her other hand. The child’s gaze bounced desperately between her brother and Kaeya.

Kaeya felt bad. Both for Klee and himself, because her visits really did wonders to raise his spirits.

Albedo sighed, “Be a good girl, Klee, please. Kaeya needs to get some more rest...”

That was the end of the argument. Even at her young age, Klee was... exceptionally considerate. When she was aware enough to be.

Her big, pouty gaze landed on Kaeya one last time with a despondent, “Okay...”

And Kaeya really resented being the excuse to get her to behave... even if lessons truly were important.

He threw on some puppy-dog eyes of his own- "One more hug!"

He opened his arms, and the tiny red child squirmed gleefully out of her babysitter's grip. She launched herself toward the bed before climbing gingerly up.

As gingerly as she could manage, of course. Which wasn't very.

Kaeya had to play off a grunt of pain as a cough as her arms gripped his trunk like a vice.

He pressed a kiss into her hair before ruffling it, "Do good with lessons and I'll be sure to get you a big surprise, okay bug?"

Klee gasped and Kaeya could have sworn her eyes sparkled- "What kind of surprise?!"

"Nuh uh," Kaeya held up a finger, "That's for me to know, and you to find out when Albedo and I see those good marks!"

Klee nodded vigorously, and just as quickly as she'd scrambled up onto the bed, she scrambled back down.

Then eagerly dragged Ms. Hertha out into the hall.

Albedo and Kaeya both watched the door close, without even a single glance back from the child.

Kaeya smirked.

*Don't believe anyone who tries to claim bribes don't work.*

Albedo huffed as he sat heavily in the chair beside the bed, "You spoil her."

Kaeya raised an eyebrow, "You don't?"

Albedo smirked, "Not as badly as you."

Kaeya hummed, "Right. Sure."

Albedo rubbed between his eyes, feigning stress, "Agree to disagree, then?"

Kaeya nodded with a smirk of his own. Then he fidgeted in an attempt to get more comfortable.

Albedo leaned forward and pulled the quilt up and over him more securely. Then he frowned, "When did you last ice your knee?"

Kaeya hummed again, and his eye narrowed, "A few hours ago, I think."

"Would you like me to get some mistflower corollas?" Albedo's head tilted with the question.

Kaeya shook his head in response, and his lips worked their way into a fine line- "I- I don't know that I can take any more poking and prodding today Beetle... Especially with so much planned for tomorrow..."

Albedo reached forward and patted his hand, "That's perfectly fine."

Kaeya swallowed. It was incredible how much Klee... helped him feel normal...

The child left, and practically dragged all of the normality of the situation out with her-

Or perhaps it was more that she was one of very few reasons for him to put on a brave face. And that when she left, his facade crumbled away in due course.

Regardless, there really was something to that whole ‘fake it til you make it’ thing, because even if his smiles around Klee started out forced, it didn’t take long for them to feel natural, and for even his pain to seem minimal as he constantly reassured the child that it *was* minimal.

He sighed shakily.

“What would help, Kae?” Albedo’s hand tightened around his own.

“A shot or two of firewater, probably.”

Albedo frowned, “Not with the medicine you’re on. Apologies.”

Kaeya sighed wistfully, “Unfortunate...” Then he turned to fully face the alchemist, “You never explained why you were being weird earlier.”

Albedo blinked, “‘Weird’?”

Kaeya nodded, “About Diluc being gone.”

Albedo hummed. There was a slight trace of a grimace as he looked away-

Kaeya gritted his teeth, “Albedo. You are sending a shot of electro straight into my anxiety right now-”

“It’s-” The grimace grew, as expressions only truly did when Albedo was around those he was fully comfortable with- those who he did not feel the subconscious need to be reserved with- “I just... worry... that is all, Kaeya.”

“About what?” Kaeya was not put at ease in any way, shape, or form.

Albedo sighed, “Are you certain... Are you certain you truly wish to stay at the winery?” Worry pinched the corners of the alchemist’s eyes. It was subtle, but there- “I would be more than happy to open my home to you, Jean would as well, or we could always take turns simply staying at your apartment-” Albedo cut himself off as he took in Kaeya’s expression.

Kaeya himself wondered what it must look like, because he had no idea exactly which emotion was plastering itself across his face-

“Kaeya... Please just...” Albedo’s shoulders slumped as he heaved out another weary breath, “I only want... I just want you to be cautious...”

“Why.” Anger? Anxiety?

Agreement?

There was a pit in Kaeya’s stomach, and he wasn’t sure exactly what put it there.

He wished Jean were here... She’d been gone for a while...

She had said that she would be back around dinner time, so Kaeya really wanted time to just get on with it already and *move-*

Albedo's eyes closed slowly, "I am sorry... I was... I was trying not to touch the nerve that I very obviously just stepped on..."

"You don't trust him."

That was it. That was the nerve-

Albedo winced, "I don't... It's not so much a matter of trust, it's... the fact that he hurt you... *has* hurt you many times in the past--"

"I hurt him more." Kaeya's jaw clenched as he spoke with confidence and... something bordering near a sense of authority on the matter- "And the hurt on my part was manipulative and intentional. He never *meant* to burn me, so the fact that you continue to hold it against him--"

Albedo held up a hand, "Kaeya- I mean more... how he's treated you in general since returning. Every conversation that I've seen or heard about has ended in a fight, and-" The alchemist sighed, "I know you both care about each other. That much is obvious. I'm more worried about him hurting you without intending it, at this point."

"I'm not some delicate flower." Kaeya glared, "I can handle a few barbs, and even dish them out. Your worry is misplaced."

Albedo nodded, "Alright. Forget I said anything, then..."

Kaeya worked his jaw.

Albedo didn't... *get* it...

But Albedo was also being much more diplomatic- hell, much more *friendly* toward Diluc than Kaeya would have expected.

It made him wonder what he'd missed, because he *had* to have missed something with the sort of 180 the past few days had been.

Albedo had been *livid* when Kaeya finally admitted the origin of his scars. That had been a few years ago. Before Albedo... knew better than to push on certain topics...

The alchemist had calmed down somewhat when Kaeya explained the entirety of the situation, but...

Kaeya couldn't actually tell how much of that was Albedo understanding, and how much of it was him forcing calm for Kaeya's sake...

Albedo was... eerily good at managing his expressions.

He was one of very few people that Kaeya couldn't read. Unless Albedo wanted him to, of course.

And Kaeya genuinely felt that part of this particular... *misunderstanding* lay in the nature of Albedo's own vision.

There was no losing control of a geo vision, after all...

Kaeya himself only truly and fully appreciated just how difficult and painful the more reactive elements could be when he personally...

Kaeya shuddered, and he was unsure if his vision- tied next to him on the bedpost and glowing

brightly- let out a light chill with his stress, or if it was in his head- in his memory.

He gritted his teeth.

Kaeya held nothing against Diluc for his injury the night of their fight. That was the long and short of it, and it was best not to dwell.

As for the rest of it... there... might have been some lingering resentment on his part... for being essentially ignored on a good day, and mercilessly berated on a bad one. Going on for what was approaching about a year and a half or so-

*Immature...*

Holding a grudge felt so, *so* pointless... It took energy he didn't have, and it wasn't like he didn't deserve the treatment anyway. He'd taken a hammer to their relationship when Diluc had been at his most vulnerable.

Kaeya deserved a certain amount of vitriol for that...

The familiar feelings of hurt, anxiety, and *fear* bubbled up all the same-

Kaeya reached up absently to scratch at his face-

Albedo sat forward and once again took his hand in his own before Kaeya could pick at the stitches across his forehead.

"Breathe, Kaeya..." Albedo rubbed his thumb in a circle across the back of his hand, "I didn't mean to upset you, please try to relax..."

Kaeya swallowed thickly, "He doesn't hate me." His breaths shook, "H-He doesn't-"

Albedo's expression fell, and he quickly moved to sit on the edge of the bed, "He doesn't." He rubbed his hands up and down Kaeya's biceps, "You're alright, Kaeya-"

"He's hated me for so long-" Kaeya's breath hitched, "I- I'd kind of g-given up-"

*I just want to fix it all I need is a chance to fix it-*

*Just a chance-*

"Shh..." Albedo pulled him into a gentle hug, "I don't think he ever truly hated you, Kaeya... I think... I think he has his own issues that he doesn't know how to properly deal with, and instead of facing the implications of your original confrontation head on, he chose instead to take his negative emotions out on you."

Kaeya grunted. Then he tucked his face into the alchemist's neck. The man's skin was unusually cool, as it always was.

It helped temper the throbbing behind his eyes.

Albedo rubbed his back, "I think... I think Master Diluc just needed a catalyst. An energy boost, as it were- in order to get over himself properly."

Kaeya snorted, "So I should have gotten myself kidnapped and tortured much sooner... had I truly wanted my family back."

*Had to suffer first. How apt-*

Still... Kaeya didn't... Kaeya didn't think...

He felt so broken...

If that truly was the case, then the cost had been so, *so* high that he wasn't really sure if-

"That is not-" Albedo stiffened, "That is not what I meant, and neither is it the least bit humorous, Kaeya."

Kaeya hummed.

*I... wasn't really joking...*

Kaeya was actually in the midst of a decently comprehensive cost-benefit analysis on whether this whole experience was worth finding out his brother still cared about him-

Albedo sighed heavily, "I do believe that this is a good sign that it is time for me to stop talking..."

Kaeya frowned, "But I like hearing you talk, Beetle..."

"You like twisting my words to serve your own self-deprecation."

Kaeya blinked, "Wow, B-"

*Not inaccurate now that you've pointed it out- but **damn-***

Albedo worked his jaw, "S-Sorry- I did not think that statement through before-"

Kaeya closed his eye as he remained practically slumped over the smaller man's shoulder, "It's fine... you're at your best when you're blunt..."

*No room for interpretation in that one...*

"I am trying to-" Albedo sighed, "It is better to be less... straightforward... and I have been trying to soften the way I speak..."

*Yeah... I noticed...*

*You're not very good at it.*

Kaeya hummed, "You shouldn't do that... Makes it easier to talk circles around you..."

Albedo grunted in obvious frustration.

Kaeya sighed. He wrapped his arms around his friend in order to properly return the hug, "No one wants you to change, Beetle... Speak freely- however you'd like..."

"Your brother is not the only one I worry about hurting their loved ones unintentionally, Kaeya." Albedo shifted in discomfort, "I have... 'stepped in it' on numerous occasions, as you like to say..."

Kaeya huffed, "That doesn't mean you should..." He sighed, "I misspeak all the time, B. It happens."

Albedo pulled back from the hug with a scoff, "You do not 'misspeak', Kaeya. I have never once

heard you-”

Kaeya raised an eyebrow.

Albedo huffed.

“Twisting words takes practice... And more often than not leads to hurt feelings. I like the way you speak and interact both with people and the world around you, Albedo...” Kaeya leaned his forehead back down onto the alchemist’s shoulder, “Please don’t change...”

*Don’t try to be like me...*

*And by the grace of the stars please don’t **actually** end up like me-*

*You need better examples from people who are actually emotionally stable...*

Albedo grumbled. Then he sighed heavily, “Your brother cares very much for you- that much has become obvious. But I worry that he... that he himself is not well enough to support you- to help you.”

Kaeya sighed, “I don’t... I don’t need him to ‘help me’ ... I just... I just need him to *be* here... I’ve missed him, Beetle... He’s my family, and I don’t have much of that left...”

“I understand, Kaeya.” Albedo shifted to press a gentle kiss to Kaeya’s cheek, “But I think you have more family than you realize.”

Kaeya snuggled further into the hug, “Thank you, B... that means a lot.”

Albedo squeezed him a little tighter in return, “Of course.”

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Chapter End Notes

so basically, kaeya has way more people who love him than he realizes-

Chapter 12

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

Kaeya

Kaeya sucked in a sharp breath as Jean turned his leg. His shoulders were at his ears, and he sat up straighter and straighter with each poke and prod-

“Jean, by all the stars, *please*-”

“Kaeya, I *have* to get some idea of what’s going on before we try a proper healing session, and the swelling has finally gone down enough to-”

“My knee’s fucking *broken!* That’s what’s going on!” Kaeya bit his lip in a bid to stop shouting. Then he shoved the collar of his shirt in his mouth and bit down on that instead.

Jean sighed, “Kaeya, how much of this is pain, and how much are you... in your head?”

Kaeya’s teeth wanted to chatter. He bit down harder on the fabric of the scratchy tunic. He didn’t answer.

Which was, in itself, an answer.

Jean sighed, “Alright... Let’s ice it a little longer then, yeah?”

Kaeya nodded.

Jean stood with a gentle smile-

“I’m sorry, Jean-” The words were slightly muffled, as he still had his shirt in his mouth.

I’m really being a fucking child about this-

Kaeya felt... very strange... somewhere between panicked and... he didn’t know.

The only thing he knew was that every time anyone so much as touched his knee it sent his stomach flipping over itself.

End over end.

And the image of his leg bending *way* too far in the wrong direction got stuck behind his eyes, and he started sweating, and he’d swear he could still hear the echoes of laughter rattling around in his skull-

Stars... please make it stop...

“Kaeya, it’s fine. Relax,” She reached out and cupped his cheek gently. Tears squeezed out.

The nurses really shouldn’t have lowered his dosage...

He was sorely missing the slight cloudiness of the pain medication. It didn’t cut out all of the panic (that’s not what it was for, after all), but now that the buffer between him and reality was that much

thinner... reality was looking rather ugly.

And altogether terrifying-

His teeth chattered as he finally stopped gnawing on his shirt like some sort of deranged gerbil.

Jean's thumbs gently wiped his tears and she sighed, "You're alright, Kaeya. Breathe."

I'm really not, but I'll take the comfort.

With about a thousand grains of guilt-

Jean sighed again, heavier this time, "Tell me what you're thinking, Kae."

Kaeya whined.

"Shh... Alright, alright... Lists. Go."

Kaeya groaned, "I don't want to-" He cut himself off as the protest grew more childish than he could stomach, "Fine."

He gritted his teeth in frustration. It wasn't like his room had changed, like, at all in the past week or so since he'd been here...

"Um... Flowers... Klee picked me some asters and calla lilies..."

"One," Jean held up a finger with a smile.

That should count for two...

Oh, whatever.

Kaeya frowned. It was almost a pout, really, "She also drew me a horse... pinned on the wall..." Kaeya blinked- "The drawing is pinned on the wall, not the horse itself-"

Jean snorted and held up another finger, "Three more, you goof."

Kaeya couldn't help the way his shoulders relaxed a fraction, "Hmmm... The water stain on the ceiling over there- I *swear* it's growing." He pointed toward the corner. It had stormed two nights ago.

That had been... a rough night... for both him and his brother.

Kaeya had... Kaeya had never actually seen Diluc outright *panic* the way he had as the thunder rolled and rain pelted the windows...

It was... upsetting.

Jean tilted her head as she looked. She held up another finger as she squinted a bit, "I don't think so, Kae. The leak's been fixed, they just haven't bothered with cosmetic repairs. They'll probably get to it once the room is unoccupied."

Kaeya hummed. If he squinted it kind of looked like a bunny.

He shook his head to clear it. Which made his head hurt- the ache radiated from near his temple, where he'd been whacked with-

Not helping.

Breathe.

Kaeya did just that- he took a deep breath and did his best to force lightness into his tone, “Jean, I am telling you, it has changed shape. It has also grown a face and started talking to me. It’s my new sleep paralysis demon-”

“Oh, shut up-”

Kaeya flinched slightly as Jean flicked at his nose.

His grin grew.

“Two more, smart ass.”

“Uhh...” Kaeya looked around, “I’m out of new things...”

Unless dust bunnies count...

They probably do, actually-

Jean’s eyes rolled, “They don’t have to be new. You can recycle, silly.”

Kaeya sighed, “Fine, my quilt and Diluc’s coat. Because the idiot apparently doesn’t get cold.”

Jean hummed, “It *is* pretty chilly out...” Her head tilted, “But he also has his vision. He’s probably more comfortable in the cooler weather.”

Kaeya huffed, “Sure, sure- if he actually carried it.”

Jean’s brow furrowed, “What do you mean?”

“Adeline took it back to the winery when she last visited. So far as I know she didn’t bring it back with her today. I don’t have any clue how he isn’t dizzy or... I don’t know...” Kaeya grumbled.

He rubbed his thumb along the glassy surface of his own vision. It was clipped to a short leather band, looped on the bed rail next to him. Easy access. And if they had to take him somewhere, then he could easily loop it around his wrist, or quickly throw it around his neck like a giant pendant.

The damn thing wasn’t about to leave his sight.

Hell, even when it had just been in his lap-

It had gotten jumbled up in the bed sheets while he slept at one point. He almost froze himself solid in a panic when he couldn’t immediately find it.

Kaeya had no idea how Diluc could stand to have his vision tucked in a drawer- let alone gone-taken a few miles away-

His skin crawled.

Jean sighed, “There’s a big difference between a vision willingly left and a vision... taken. I think that’s why it doesn’t bother him, Kaeya.”

Kaeya grumbled some more.

“Are you feeling better, or are we listing tactile sensations?”

Kaeya sighed, “I’m feeling better... Thank you Jean...”

Jean nodded, “I’ll get a few more mistflower corollas, okay? Be back in a minute.”

Kaeya nodded. He pulled his vision off the bed post and held it securely between his palms as he watched her leave. He continued rubbing his thumbs absently over its surface, then over the setting.

His nail caught in a new scratch in the metal.

The pad of his thumb rubbed over a new dent.

Even his vision was unfamiliar now.

Everything felt unfamiliar now...

—

“If it gets too cold, tell me, alright?” Jean tucked a second mistflower- wrapped in a hand towel- behind his knee.

Kaeya nodded. He finally relaxed again when she moved away from his leg, “Thank you, Jeanie...”

“Of course. Now, what do you want to do in the meantime?”

Kaeya frowned. He reached up to absently scratch at his forehead-

“If you pick at it, it *will* scar.”

Kaeya blinked. Then he lowered his hand, because he hadn’t *really* been thinking about it, but he truly was about to scratch at the stitches.

They were infuriatingly itchy. Which meant they were healing, but also meant that they were starting to drive him absolutely mad-

“Jean. A wound needing ten stitches across my *face* is going to scar no matter what.”

Jean frowned, “It’ll fade over time, Kaeya. But interrupting the healing now will only make it worse.” Her face scrunched even more, “And you only have seven stitches in, you dramatic-”

“I know...” Kaeya grumbled, “I rounded up- ten sounds more badass-”

Jean huffed out a laugh, “Wow.”

His lips squirmed up in a small, tired smile as he played with the blanket in his lap- the quilt that Adelinde had brought him...

The quilt he used to keep on his bed when he lived at the manor...

It had been a gift. A first birthday gift, actually- along with an official welcome into the family. It was a beautifully stitched scene of the area surrounding Vennessa’s tree... He absently traced a

cloth-rendered calla lily with his... half-hand...

He studied said hand. It was still well wrapped in bandages, but the swelling had gone down considerably.

The injury wasn't so bad, really, now that the worst of the pain was dull and more or less manageable. He still had to remind himself not to try to pick things up with it- lest the pain become *unmanageable* and he end up dropping shit-

A finger poked his forehead- between the stitches and the strap of his eyepatch- and he startled pretty bad-

"Sorry-" Jean pulled her hand away somewhat sheepishly, "You were uhh... pretty deep in your head there... mora for your thoughts Captain Badass?"

Kaeya scowled as his heart finally stopped skipping beats, "My hand is ugly. That's the thought. I don't know if it's worth a whole mora."

Jean hummed. She held her hand out, palm up.

Kaeya offered his own forward.

She took it gently enough. But like with a lot of touch lately... Kaeya had to force his skin not to crawl...

She studied it carefully, "It's healing really well, Kaeya."

"I know, I know... I should be glad I didn't lose the whole hand..." Kaeya waved his other somewhat flippantly.

Jean frowned, "I didn't say that, Kae. You're allowed to be upset, I'm only commenting on my excellent healing work." She turned his hand carefully, feeling for swelling, and very obviously using her magic to assess- "I did a great job!"

Kaeya snorted, and despite his horrid mood a small smile tilted the edges of his lips, "You did... thank you."

Jean gave him a cheeky grin, "I'm glad you think so too. Now, what would you like to do?"

Kaeya sighed, "Jean, I know you have a lot to do- you don't have to stay here. I know you're busy..."

Jean's entire expression flattened, "Kaeya. *You* are my priority. I'm starting to get a little miffed at how you're *always* trying to get me to delegate more, and now that I am you're trying to get me back in my office-"

"I want you to take more time *off*, Jean. Not work just as hard on... something else..."

*Some **one** else...*

Me. I don't want you to waste time on me, is what I am overly articulating in my head here-

Jean's eyebrows rose toward her hairline, "Mhm. Right. Because helping my best friend is in no way fulfilling- nor does it help soothe my own anxiety."

Kaeya grumbled as he looked away.

Jean leaned back into his field of vision- “Because taking care of my *family* isn’t something that I might *want* to do.”

Kaeya worked his jaw.

“You’re right,” Jean stood somewhat suddenly, “I would *definitely* prefer to be going through logistics reports right now. Ordering the correct number of uniforms for the training room is *way* more important than hanging out with you, so-”

“Jerk-” Kaeya threw one of his pillows. The action caused a barely-concerning twinge in his side. Which marked definite progress.

Jean caught it with a grin. Then her head tilted, “We could play a game.”

Kaeya huffed. He turned to stare out the window. The light was bright, so his reflection was barely a ghost of an outline.

Which was... alright.

The light wasn't *great* for his near-constant headache, but at least... at least he couldn't see his reflection at the moment...

“I’m feeling boring, Jean. You really don’t have to stay... Barbara can do the assessment for my knee, then... then whatever...”

Jean’s eyes narrowed, “‘Then whatever.’ Spoken like someone who is truly in a healthy mindset. And who should definitely be left alone.”

Kaeya huffed, “I’m tired, Jean...”

“Then nap, I’ll read in the chair,” Jean stepped closer. She tucked the pillow back behind him carefully.

Kaeya worked his jaw, “What if they say I can’t leave today...?”

Jean’s lips pursed as she next moved to adjust the blanket, careful to leave his leg mostly uncovered until they were done icing it, “Then you stay another night.”

Kaeya groaned-

“Relax. It’s unlikely. Your leg is the biggest concern now, and the only reason they would keep you is if we decide immediate surgery is the best option.”

“‘Immediate.’ Meaning a week later,” Kaeya grumbled. He really was feeling quite cranky.

But honestly, he really wished they had just cut him up and stitched him back together properly while he was too out of it to complain. Or feel it. Or care-

“Yes, well. We had other concerns that you had to survive first.”

Kaeya groaned.

Jean huffed, “Again, I said it was unlikely. It will probably be some time before they decide to move forward with-”

“I want to go home.”

I don't give a fuck about my leg...

Kaeya did actually give a fuck about his leg. But he gave more fucks about leaving the cathedral.

He was going stir-crazy.

Jean sighed, "And you will. As soon as we can get your leg better situated. Which means at least one proper healing session."

Kaeya grumbled, "Fine..."

Jean perched herself on the edge of the bed, "I'll do some light healing now, then when Barbara and that other healer come for the final assessment you'll be in that much better shape, yeah?"

Kaeya nodded.

"Then we'll get you a solid brace, and you'll be good to go home. Easy peasy."

Kaeya nodded again.

~~~~~

### ***Diluc***

"Right. Exactly what should he take and when?" Diluc rifled through the small vials and tinctures on the counter in front of him.

His gaze bounced between the labels and the instruction sheet-

"I can handle that, sir," Adelinde gently pulled the page out of his hand before turning back to Lisa, "I understand you have another regimen for Master Diluc as well?"

Diluc blinked. Then he scowled.

He almost protested. Almost.

The librarian hid a chuckle behind a coy smile and teasing eyes- she made fleeting eye contact with him before turning her complete attention to his head housekeeper- "Yes, he's on another short course of antibiotics- just to be absolutely safe since he reopened some of the stitches in his arm yesterday."

A pointed look. Some might call it a glare-

Diluc did everything in his power to keep his expression neutral.

He was used to lifting heavy things. Personally, he wouldn't even consider the crate of wine he'd picked up heavy at all- by any metric.

The still-healing stab wound in his arm had... adamantly disagreed.

As had Charles. When the man walked into the storage room at Angel's Share to find Diluc staring stupidly at a growing bloodstain seeping through his shirtsleeve-

Diluc blamed the concussion when pressed.

Jean claimed he was simply an idiot. Or maybe that had been Kaeya?

Diluc wasn't sure. Both of them had been rather ruthless when he was brought back to the Cathedral for healing yesterday evening.

Jean had even gone on about how she shouldn't have let him leave the Cathedral at all...

But Diluc had been antsy- had been extremely anxious as he was finally well enough to not sleep all day, and he had a lot to prepare with Kaeya coming home and he wanted to make certain they had his favorite foods and yes, even wine for when he finished his current course of medication, and-

And none of Diluc's usual pipelines had produced anything resembling a promising lead on where the Treasure Hoarders could have possibly found out about Kaeya's past.

So Diluc was going a little bit crazy, admittedly.

And he'd just popped into Angel's Share for a quick check-in to see what they had, and what they might need him to order and sign off on. And a crate just happened to be out of place, and he hadn't even thought twice before moving to lift it...

Lisa picked up a vial that had little pills in it, and the slight rattle brought Diluc back to present- "This one is for pain, it's the same one for Kaeya, but Master Diluc here is on a lower dose. Follow the instructions to the letter for this one. If additional pain management is needed, this-" Another vial of slightly rounder pills, "Can supplement with little worry of side effects or dependency. They're less effective, but they can be ground and mixed into things if that is preferred."

She was still talking directly to Adelinde.

Diluc crossed his arms over his chest, "I can be in charge of my own medicines."

Adelinde turned and shot him a glare, "Can you?"

Diluc blinked, "Y-Yes. I can-"

"Young man, I am the one who found-" She bit off her words, but her glare continued.

Diluc would have balked. If it was in any way unusual for Adelinde to talk to him like he was a child.

He sighed and didn't argue.

Diluc didn't like medicine. Never had, really. He was good for a few days, and he took whatever Jean gave him.

But then he'd started to feel better and decided 'screw it'.

And unfortunately that particular day coincided with a visit from Adelinde. Who knew his tendencies.

And checked the trash in Kaeya's room. Because of course she did.

(Kaeya tattled while Diluc was in the bathroom. Because they are both *literal* children.)

Lisa's expression looked somewhere between amused and uncomfortable.

This was all... incredibly embarrassing...



*I shouldn't have come...*

But then Adelinde huffed and shoved the instruction sheet into his hands, "Fine. But if I find you've not been taking *everything* as directed I'm taking over. Understood?"

"Yes ma'am..."

Her eyes narrowed and she huffed, "I'm taking care of Kaeya's from the start, though. You don't get a say in this."

Diluc nodded, "Alright."

It was fair. And it made sense, logically speaking.

Adelinde had a much better sense of these sorts of things by the very nature of her job. And she'd spent plenty of time nursing both him and Kaeya when they were sick as children. Especially Kaeya... Kaeya got sick a lot more than Diluc had, when they were little. Diluc refused to think about the fact that he didn't know if that was still the case-

She nodded back, "Good."

She turned to Lisa, "This is everything for the boys?"

*'Boys'... Way to rub salt in it, Adie...*

Diluc sighed.

*Embarrassing indeed...*

The librarian nodded, "It is, yes- oh!" She held up a finger, "One more thing, before I forget."

Lisa turned and rummaged through another cabinet. She pulled out a completely different vial, "Sister Julia asked me personally to work on something of a cough medicine. For... someone on your staff, I believe? I'm not sure I remember exactly who, I'm afraid, but I and the chief alchemist have collaborated to create a suitable and hopefully effective concoction."

*I think you mean Jilliana. And that would be for Tunner...*

Diluc felt his eyes narrow. It wasn't like Lisa to forget or mix up names.

He studied the cough medicine in her hand. Hopefully this one would actually work...

Adelinde had long been... *concerned* for the old man's health. She brought up the issue with Diluc regularly, and in a very accusatory manner, truth be told.

But no matter how often he tried to reduce the man's hours, Tunner would simply work the usual shift...

Something about an old debt that Diluc had long since erased from the books- once again at Adelinde's insistence, seeing as Diluc hadn't even been aware of the debt until she brought it up- though the man simply refused to hear it.

Personally, Diluc agreed with his housekeeper. He didn't much care how old some disgusting vintage of wine was, no broken bottle was worth-

Lisa held the vial forward.

Adeline's expression lit up as she took it, "Ah! Yes! Tunner's cough has been acting up again lately- likely with the change in weather and all that." She gave Lisa a warm smile, "Thank you Ms. Minci, we greatly appreciate the effort this must have taken-"

Lisa waved a hand, "Not at all- credit is also shared with dear Albedo and Sucrose- they did the majority of the legwork on this one. Along with sweet Noelle- she made quite the effective runner for supplies and whatnot."

Diluc grunted.

*They really overwork that poor girl...*

*Or... that poor girl really overworks herself...?*

With the knights, it was sometimes hard to tell.

"Well, thank you anyway, Ms. Minci. I am sure your expertise was invaluable to the endeavor! Please do extend our gratitude to the others as well- should you run into them before we do!"

"Of course," Lisa answered with a smile.

"Alright, we should be getting out of your hair, then. I'm sure you've been quite busy with Grandmaster Jean so occupied these past few weeks."

Lisa shook her head, and with an uncharacteristically chipper tone (when talking about work, anyway), "Nonsense. It is nothing I am not more than happy to handle."

The woman's smile was genuine, but the bags under her eyes, and the slight pallor to her skin told a bit of a different story. She was feeling the strain.

It spoke volumes that she not only didn't complain, but neglected also to acknowledge it.

Diluc hovered between admiration, gratitude, and worry...

Adeline gave her another smile and nodded, "I am glad to hear it. Good day to you ma'am. May the wind be always at your back."

Lisa chuckled and nodded as well, "And may it lead you safely home. Keep well, Ms. Adeline."

With that, Adeline scooped up the small box of Kaeya's medicine, "Come, Master Diluc. We're in a hurry," And swept out of the room.

"Well, wait- Adie, slow down-" Diluc took his own medicines from Lisa as she held them forward-

Her hand covered her mouth primly, and a delicate laugh slipped out, "My, my, Master Diluc. I never expected to see you so flustered!" Another laugh, "And acquiescent- dare I say... downright *obedient*-"

Diluc withered, "Lisa."

"Yes?" Another borderline malicious smile.

It really did make sense that she and Kaeya were such good friends...

They had the same damn head on their shoulders, and the same nose for sniffing out weakness.

His worry for the woman's health evaporated with the heat of his embarrassment, and Diluc didn't know what he could possibly say that might temper it-

"Sorry, sorry- I couldn't resist that one-" Her hand waved as if to dispel the tease- "I have something else for you, if I could keep you another moment?"

Diluc fidgeted. He forced himself not to turn to look at the door- "Um... Sure, what do you need, Ms. Minci?"

Lisa had already turned to a cabinet, "I have something for *you*, Master Diluc. *I* don't need anything."

She pulled out one vial, then started sorting through some other kind of medicine.

More pills.

Diluc felt his face sour, "Oh... kay..."

Lisa counted a number out into yet another little prescription bottle, "Relax, Master Diluc! No need to sound so suspicious all the time."

Diluc winced.

He shifted his weight again, uncomfortable.

"This is something... Well, it's something for when it rains. If you catch my drift?"

Diluc glared. He felt heat rise to his cheeks-

"Or if you're feeling particularly anxious for any other reason!" The slightly teasing smile remained, but the tone of the woman's voice tightened to indicate that she realized just how thin the ice was on which she tread- "Please relax, Master Diluc- it is simply a bit of a sedative to fight off panic and severe anxiety. Nothing more and nothing less. Simply take it if you wish before, or even after a known stressor occurs."

Diluc stared at the vial.

He hummed.

Lisa sighed, "You are offended. What about this is offensive?"

Diluc's face scrunched, "I'm... not... I just..." He looked away. He sighed, "Didn't realize..."

He normally hid away at home.

There had been nowhere to hide in the cathedral-

"Jean told me about your panic attack in complete confidence, Master Diluc. And I have told no one else. Not even your mother-"

Diluc's face scrunched even more- "Adeline isn't actually my mother, you know-"

Lisa's smile spread like a cheshire, "Ah, but you knew exactly who I meant!"

Diluc wilted.

Lisa sighed, “Please just take them with you. It’s ultimately your choice if you decide to use them.”

Diluc nodded, “Did you give any to Adelinde for Kaeya?”

Lisa blinked. Then her eyes narrowed, “*Should* I have prepared some for Kaeya?”

Diluc shrugged. He immediately regretted it considering how tender the burns on his neck and shoulder still were- “He panics too. And considering... everything...”

He fidgeted again.

Lisa nodded, then pulled out another empty prescription vial, “You are correct... though Jean may want to start him on something meant for more... consistent treatment...” She handed over both medicines, “Take *one* and only one within any given 24 hour period. If either of you start relying on them more than three days a week or so, then *please* talk to me or Jean and we’ll figure something else out. They’re meant for acute treatment, not chronic.”

Diluc frowned, “You’re assuming I’ll take them at all.”

Now he was just being petty.

Lisa sighed again, “That’s fair, considering you didn’t ask for them...” She smiled at him tiredly, “I am simply worried about you. You and your brother both, alright? If what I offer doesn’t help, then do what is right for you.”

Diluc suddenly felt bad... He shifted his weight again, then tucked the small vials in with the rest of his medicines, “I... Thank you... I do appreciate it... Truly.”

Lisa nodded.

“T’d... I’d best be off... Keep well, Ms. Minci. And be sure *you’re* getting enough rest as well.”

Lisa hummed and nodded, “Easier said than done at the current moment, but I do believe I am due for an afternoon nap.” Her smile spread, “So I think I will heed that advice.”

Diluc smiled, “Good to hear.”

He gave one final wave before hurrying to catch up with Adelinde.

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Diluc was getting tired.

He refused to let it show. Or, perhaps more accurately, he refused to acknowledge it himself.

His arm was aching from lifting things (as he wasn’t really supposed to do), and the mostly-healed burns around his trunk were sore and itchy- both at the same time. His neck and cheek were even worse- more than once Adelinde swatted his hands away from his face to prevent him from scratching.

Sweat from moving around and running errands compounded these issues, despite the fact that Diluc had purposely left his coat back at the cathedral.

And also the fact that they had only been out and about for an hour or so...

Adelinde sighed, and shifted the basket of supplies to her other hip as she perused the shelves of

Blanche's shop, "Master Diluc, why don't you sit down for a moment? There's a bench right outside."

Diluc frowned as he looked up from a can of... something he'd been staring at. He'd been hoping Adie wouldn't notice the way he'd just swayed on his feet...

He sighed and replaced what he now knew were peas on the shelf.

Then he stepped out of the grocer's and plopped himself heavily onto the bench.

He was... really tired. And stressed. Although, most of the 'tired' probably came from the 'stressed'.

He briefly considered giving one of Lisa's pills a try before immediately dismissing the thought.

If they were for "rainy days", then they were probably for much more extreme stress levels than grocery shopping could produce.

He ignored the curious glances of passersby. If he made eye contact then he'd have to wave, or try to smile or something... and then someone might try to make *conversation*-

It was better to just pretend to be oblivious.

More sweat dripped down his neck, and the discomfort was irritating. It made the bandages chafe. He'd have to redress the burns as soon as he got back to the cathedral...

Or possibly home? Then he'd actually put the effort in to bathe before treating the wounds...

(Yes, he bathed during his stay at the cathedral. But considering he was expecting their time there to be over by this afternoon he had no desire to take another shower in the small, uncomfortable bathroom.)

He also couldn't wait to sleep in his own bed... or- a more comfortable bed, at least.

If the healers would just show up and clear Kaeya to leave already-

Diluc grumbled and pulled his hair out of its tie. The low ponytail was making his neck and back sweat almost as much as just leaving it down would.

He ignored the twinge in his injured wrist and gathered his thick curls- higher on his head this time- and tied it off. The ends still brushed his neck, but it no longer sat heavy, like a woolen blanket. He didn't have the energy to try for a bun at the moment. This was good enough.

He relaxed into the bench, already much more comfortable.

Nobody bothered him. But that might have been because he had his eyes closed, and was pretending to doze with his arms crossed over his chest.

"Master Diluc?" A light tap on his shoulder- his left shoulder- the one less likely to be sore, or cause a reaction in general. Even though right now it was actually *more* sore than his right- given the burns-

He blinked up into a gentle smile from Adelinde.

"Young Master, why don't you head back to the cathedral? Get some rest, Elzer and I can handle the preparations. We'll come get you both after his last healing session."

Diluc hummed, "That is a good idea, I think..." He didn't want to stand up yet. He really was tired...

Adeline huffed a light laugh before sitting next to him, "Not even a fake protest. You really are worn out, hm?" Gentle fingers tucked a loose strand of hair behind his ear.

He hummed in response.

"Here," Adeline unscrewed a canteen and pushed it into his hands, "I haven't seen you drink anything since we left this morning."

Oh. Oops.

That might be why I feel so shitty.

"Thank you." He took a hearty swig.

"Go hang out with your brother, everything's more or less settled anyway, Master Diluc."

Diluc nodded, "Do... you don't think he'll mind being in a guest room... do you?" Anxiety churned.

Their actual rooms were on the second floor.

And there was no way Kaeya would be able to handle stairs right now without a lot of help and an unreasonable amount of risk.

Diluc was going to take the room right next to his, so he was sure that in itself would make it clear that the reasoning was Kaeya's health- *not* because he's a 'guest'.

Adeline raised an eyebrow, "He's said he doesn't mind, Diluc. He can't walk on his own. The first floor makes sense."

"I know, it's just- it's not *his* room and I don't want him to feel like-

"Master Diluc. Relax. It's fine," Her hand squeezed his shoulder, "Everything is fine."

"I don't want to ruin it, Adie-" Desperation seeped into his tone, "We're finally talking like normal and I'm going to mess it up, I *know* I am-"

Adeline sighed, "You're not going to mess it up, young master. The only way you could 'mess it up' is by kicking him out. Or leaving. The bar is half buried in the ground."

Diluc grumbled. He picked at his thumbs and huffed, "I really hurt him, Adie... I don't want to hurt him again..."

"Then don't. It's really quite simple." The smirk practically dripped from her tone.

Diluc pouted in response.

Adeline sighed, "It's sweet that you're so worried. And regardless of the circumstances, I'm very proud of you for working to fix things," Her arm wrapped around his shoulders.

It took him almost dying, Adeline...

Diluc's jaw clenched.

Stop. Focus on the good.

And it was *very good* that Kaeya didn't hate him. That Kaeya wanted him around, wanted his *help*, even.

Diluc sighed heavily and stood, "I'll... I'm going to go back... I wanted to be there for his last assessment anyway..."

Adeline nodded, and her head tilted with her smile, "Of course. I'll see you both later this evening."

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## Chapter End Notes

I wanna try to get to posting again on a somewhat regular schedule bc I miss it

We'll see, I kind of want this one to either be weekly or every two weeks... i do have a bit of a buffer built up, so maybe chapter next weekend!

I also wanna get going on both kidnapping and impermanence again so. Yeah, thought vomit, sorry haha

Thank you to everyone who's stuck around and commented and whatnot! Y'all are awesome

# Chapter 13

## Chapter Notes

in which kaeya proceeds to have two separate breakdowns in one chapter-

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

### ***Kaeya***

Kaeya teetered a little bit as Adelinde helped ease him onto the couch in the main parlor.

“Thank you Ms. Adelinde...” He gave her a warm, though weary smile as he settled into the cushions.

She tucked a thick blanket over his lap before setting his wheelchair right next to the arm of the couch- in front of the wall.

Kaeya’s gaze swept the foyer.

It was... a little more open than he would prefer. It would have been much nicer to relax in the den on the second floor- the one reserved and tucked away from guests.

Though... it wasn’t as if they were going to be allowing guests in the near future, with Kaeya’s whole... situation... so that made *this* room just as private- functionally speaking.

Kaeya hovered between guilt and... something that might have been satisfaction- that so much of a fuss was being made for his safety.

It was flattering, and validating, and for someone used to operating alone in the shadows, it was deeply *deeply* uncomfortable-

“No thanks are necessary, Master Kaeya. I am unbelievably happy that you are here. Even more so to help. Would you like some coffee? Or perhaps cocoa, as it is getting a bit late...”

“I *would* like some coffee, actually. I don’t think I’ll stay conscious until supper without it, to be frank.”

Adelinde frowned, “There is no reason to force anything, young master. If you are tired, then you should sleep- you’ve had an eventful day.”

Kaeya hoped his smile wasn’t a grimace, “I... um...” *Oh no... it’s definitely a grimace...* “I would like to be distracted... If I try to sleep I-” The words died in his throat.

Adelinde blinked, then patted his hand gently, “I’ll bring you a book. And some fresh coffee.”

Kaeya nodded, “Thank you Ms. Adie...”

“Just Adie, or Adelinde, Kaeya. Please.” She gave his hand a firm squeeze.

Kaeya smiled. It was a little wobbly, he could feel it- but he smiled.



Memories bubbled up unbidden, sickly bittersweet and cast in the sepia tones of nostalgia.

Scuffs in the wooden molding from training equipment that was dragged indoors against better judgment.

Skinned knees and tears.

Gentle hugs and kisses to make things better...

Jumbles of memories- both then and now.

Adeline was there for most of them.

Kaeya remembered the first time he'd slipped up and called her 'mama'. He was probably around seven at the time and it had just... slipped out.

The housekeeper had frozen in place, shock clear in her expression, which was what had clued tiny Kaeya into what he'd just done- what he'd just said.

Tears had started gathering in his eyes by the time Adeline had shaken off her surprise. But then she'd squeezed Kaeya in what was probably the tightest hug ever, and peppered kisses all over his head and cheeks, and... and tiny Kaeya understood that he hadn't screwed up after all.

And Kaeya 'slipped up' many, *many* times more, after that.

He only wished that exact level of familiarity still remained.

Everything felt... stiffer now. Like an unworn garment. Just uncomfortable enough to make him feel out of place.

Kaeya forced a smile, "Thank you Adie..."

Adeline nodded, then she turned to Diluc who was... just sort of hovering- "I do believe you should shower, Master Diluc."

Kaeya snorted out a laugh, "Yeah, you kind of stink, Lu-"

"Now, now- that's very unkind, Master Kaeya," Adeline poked his forehead, "Behave. I'll not have you two fighting right now."

Kaeya blinked.

It was Diluc's turn to laugh. Though it was a small, tired-sounding thing- but Kaeya was relieved to hear it.

Diluc didn't laugh much, generally speaking.

"Alright," Adeline straightened, "Coffee. I'll make a full pot- I assume you'll take some as well, Master Diluc?"

Diluc nodded, "Yes please, thank you Adeline."

"Right," She turned back to Kaeya, "I'll get you something to read first, sweetie."

"Thank you," Kaeya smiled.

She bustled out of the room.

Diluc sighed, “Will it bother you if I treat my burns down here?”

Kaeya blinked, then frowned, “What? Why? Won’t you need a mirror?”

Diluc fidgeted, “I... They’re not so bad... and I don’t want to ditch you-”

Kaeya let his expression soften, “Diluc. Adelinde is a room over. We’re all in the same house. I’m alright.”

*Please don’t risk an infection on my account...*

Diluc was proving to be somewhat clingy, when he was around. Kaeya generally tried not to let on how comforting he found it-

Diluc nodded, “Right... sorry...”

Kaeya felt his head tilt, “Are *you* okay?”

“I’m fine. I’ll see you... uh. In a bit.” His brother practically scurried away.

Kaeya frowned. He tried to relax.

But it wasn’t all that easy...

He really *didn’t* like being alone... despite what he’d said...

And the words of the unfamiliar doctor continued to rattle around in his skull...

He had no doubt they were also at least part of what had Diluc in such a strange mood.

The long and short of it was that Kaeya would be lucky to one day walk without assistance.

After surgery. And a long road of physical therapy.

Fighting- combat and training was out of the question.

Running would be some form of a miracle.

Kaeya was having a... strange time processing what was possibly... an unexpectedly early retirement.

It was odd.

He’d almost died.

He’d suffered severe head trauma, a stab wound, and a week of dehydration and near-starvation.

Not to mention the violent amputation of his fingers and the horrible infection that had followed...

And it was his fucking *knee* of all things, that put the final nail in the coffin- ensuring that things really *couldn’t* go back to normal after all...

Jean had assured and reassured him that he would always have a place with the knights.

And Kaeya had tried his best not to grow nauseous when considering a life of nothing but desk

work...

His least favorite part of the job.

He worked his jaw and swallowed.

Diluc had...

Diluc almost took the news harder, really. He'd left the room.

Kaeya had wondered if he was coming back, for a minute.

But then he did, and it... was fine. Everything was fine, really.

Because Kaeya was going to be fine, and the more he considered- it wasn't all *that* bad.

His mind had always been his greatest weapon anyway, and now- er, once he recovered, rather- he could-

He *would* maneuver this to his advantage. Walking with a limp and a cane would make people underestimate him. Make it that much easier to create an unthreatening... aura... or whatever...

Kaeya forced even breaths. He rubbed at the edge of the brace.

He *refused* to even think about the fact that he'd probably never ride his horse again-

"It's alright, Master Kaeya," Adeline was suddenly there.

She set a book on the side table, then sat beside him. Her arm wrapped around his back, and Kaeya didn't hesitate to lean into the hug.

He buried his face into her neck. He couldn't stop the first sob. Or the second-

He cried so easily lately...

Any semblance of his usual cool lasted maybe five seconds, on average, since waking up in the Cathedral.

He'd kept his shit together better under *torture*, for Archons' sake-

"Shh..." Adeline rubbed gentle circles into his back, "Everything will be alright... I promise, Kaeya..."

"I can't w-walk, Adie-"

"You'll walk again, Kaeya. You might need a little help, but I promise you- nothing is anywhere near as hopeless as it seems at the moment-"

"You weren't in the room, Adeline, my knee cap is all but shattered and multiple ligaments-"

"Your ACL is badly torn, MCL over extended, and you have multiple hairline fractures on your upper fibula. I am well aware of your condition, Master Kaeya."

Kaeya blinked, still tightly ensconced in the hug, "Oh..."

"And your kneecap isn't 'shattered', young master."

Kaeya grumbled, “Nitpicky...”

“Cracked yet still structurally sound is much better than ‘shattered’. I feel justified in my nitpickiness,” Adelinde rubbed another vigorous circle into his back, “Feel as upset as you need, but if you even dare to give up hope I’ll be here with a few choice words.”

Kaeya huffed, “That feels vaguely threatening...”

“Take it as you will,” She pressed a firm kiss into his hair.

He felt himself grow a little bit more steady. Sort of like... like his edges had been cracked and shifted out of place, and Adelinde’s support had pushed them back together.

He wondered if they’d stick...

He hummed in response.

“I brought you a book to read, why don’t you try to relax for a bit? Hm?”

Kaeya nodded, then wiped at his eyes as he leaned back, “Yes... thank you...”

~~~~~

Diluc

Diluc gathered up his first aid supplies and headed downstairs.

It was unbecoming to treat his wounds in the main parlor, but he really didn’t care.

Guests had been dismissed anyway- it was just him, a reduced staff, and Kaeya, so it didn’t really matter all that much.

And honestly, the only burns that were truly still... somewhat gruesome were the ones on his neck and cheek.

He wanted help with those anyway- the nerves in his neck didn’t die, so those burns were extremely painful to the touch. The nerves in his cheek were dead as could be, as it turned out (deeper burn... thinner skin...), so it was difficult for him to know how much pressure and prodding was appropriate.

It was best to ask Adelinde for help.

He rushed to gather up the basket of supplies and bring it downstairs before the housekeeper came upstairs to offer said help.

The wounds were clean, he just needed some assistance reaching certain spots on his back with ointment and dressing.

And he could tell Kaeya was taking the news about his knee much worse than he wanted to let on, so he really didn’t want to be gone long.

Diluc threw a light robe over his shoulders so that his torso wasn’t totally naked, and moved toward the stairs. He was in his softest, most comfortable pants, and had his hair up in as tight of a bun as he could manage without pulling too hard at both the burns and the hair around his face. He needed it out of the way.

All in all he was rather unsightly...

Kaeya looked up sharply from his book as the stairs creaked with Diluc's approach- he looked to be reading a murder mystery novel that Diluc himself was quite fond of.

Kaeya blinked and his eye widened.

Diluc fixed his gaze firmly on his feet and focused on not falling down the stairs.

Kaeya kept staring.

Diluc approached, then elected to sit on one of the hard wooden chairs nearby. Easier to clean if he started bleeding again...

He pulled it close to the couch before plopping himself down gracelessly.

Kaeya set his book aside as Diluc shrugged out of his robe with a wince. He set his supplies on the couch next to Kaeya and started rifling through them.

His brother's expression was... something.

Diluc worked his jaw, "Why are you staring...?" He looked down at his torso- "Am I bleeding? I didn't notice anything while washing-"

Kaeya's face scrunched, "Why am I staring? I'm staring because your torso and *face* look like you were branded by a burning tree!"

Diluc blinked, "A burning...?" He stared back down at the strange pattern. Across much of his stomach it was more red and bruised than anything, in odd fanning branches. Only a few burns were actually open- and those were mostly healed. Though they tended to crack without the ointment the nuns had given him, "Lichtenburg figures... They do sort of look like a tree... I guess..."

He had another similar, but much older scar on his right thigh. He didn't want to talk about that though, so he didn't bring it up.

He frowned, "The burns on my face are from pyro though, not electro-"

Kaeya scoffed. Then he surprised Diluc by reaching forward and tilting his chin gently. His brother grimaced, and his eyes darted across Diluc's neck and torso as well, "It's... much worse than I had been assuming..."

Diluc felt his brow furrow, "It's alright, it's not nearly so bad as it looks, K-"

"You're going to lie to *me*," Kaeya's eyebrow approached his hairline, "About the apparent severity of burns?"

Diluc winced, and the action pulled his chin out of his brother's grip.

Something cold seeped into his chest, and he turned to rifle through the medical supplies, "Apologies. I suppose you would know."

Kaeya continued studying him, eye wide "I- That wasn't supposed to-" His brother blew out a breath, "I- I'm sorry, that came out wrong, Lu-"

Diluc grunted.

“I- I really didn’t mean to-” Kaeya’s voice pitched toward a whine-

“It’s alright, Kaeya. Don’t worry about it.” Diluc pulled out a small jar of burn cream as he spoke.

Kaeya frowned.

Diluc forced his expression to soften, despite the way the skin on his cheek pulled more and more the longer it went without treatment, “*I’m* genuinely sorry... for being the reason why you understand how burns-”

“Yes, yes, so you’ve said.” Kaeya waved a hand dismissively. His shoulders were tense, and he suddenly seemed very much against the concept of eye-contact.

Diluc raised an eyebrow. He’d thought that maybe... since *Kaeya* had... sort of brought it up this time...

We’ll discuss it when he’s ready.

Kaeya was very clearly on thin ice at the moment, in terms of stress. So it was better not to push.

Diluc sighed, then smeared a generous dollop of cream across his cheek-

Kaeya huffed, “You missed a spot. Let me help with what you can’t see-”

“Your hands aren’t clean,” Diluc leaned away as Kaeya leaned forward.

Kaeya’s expression fell, but before he could truly react, Diluc pulled out disinfectant and a rag.

“Wipe your hands first, please.”

Kaeya relaxed in obvious relief. He adjusted his perch- namely the way his leg was balanced on the ottoman- so that he could sit more forward. He cleaned his hands, then took the ointment.

He dabbed it gently across the rest of the burn on Diluc’s face, then directed Diluc’s head while he started on the burns down his neck.

Diluc relaxed as the cream offered relief. He sighed, “Thank you...”

“Of course. And I...” Kaeya rubbed a particularly tender spot, and Diluc forced himself not to jerk away- “... Apologize for my initial reaction... I truly did not realize how bad...” Kaeya sighed heavily, “I was also unaware you’d been electrocuted...”

The last part was said in a half-annoyed huff.

Diluc hummed, “I thought you’d seen it... I also assumed Albedo, or perhaps Jean might have told you.”

Or Adelinde, even.

Kaeya snorted, “Communication truly is our strongest suit.” He leaned back, apparently finished with Diluc’s neck, “Any others you can’t see or reach?”

Diluc nodded, then turned.

He sat patiently as Kaeya tended to the exit wound on his back, along with the tender spots leading toward it in branching fractal patterns.

He forced himself not to wince.

“Alright, bandages?” Kaeya’s tone was... surprisingly bright.

Diluc hummed, “I can ask Adelinde, you should rest-”

Kaeya scoffed, cutting him off- “Am I doing so poor of a job that you-?” The question died halfway through, then in a quieter, more hesitant voice- “Or did... Did I hurt you?”

“What?” Diluc faced him in alarm, “No, it’s- everything’s fine, Kaeya-”

Anxiety pinched every corner of his little brother’s expression.

Diluc sighed, “Kaeya, relax... I only thought you might be tired. I didn’t mean anything by it-”

“I just want to help- I was trying to help-” Panic was leeching in. Which was wholly uncharacteristic of his brother.

Wholly uncharacteristic of Kaeya before... all of this...

Now it was almost normal.

“Breathe,” Diluc held Kaeya’s hands in his own, “Do we need lists?”

Kaeya shook his head, expression still fraught.

“Are you sure?”

Kaeya nodded.

“Help me with bandages?”

Kaeya nodded again.

And Diluc offered what he hoped was an encouraging smile, “Thank you.”

—

Kaeya’s hands still shook as he secured the last bandage around Diluc’s trunk.

Diluc offered another smile, “Thank you, K.”

He pulled the light robe over his shoulders.

Kaeya hummed shakily. Everything about him was shaky, actually-

Diluc shoved the basket of medical supplies aside, then took its place next to his brother, “Talk to me Kaeya-”

Kaeya made a small noise as he stared down at his hands, still trembling in his lap.

Diluc moved to wrap an arm over his shoulders, but Kaeya stiffened. So he pulled back.

“Kaeya-”

“I d-” Kaeya swallowed.

Then a moment later he leaned toward Diluc.

Diluc supported him, but didn't try to hold him- he just sat there as Kaeya leaned his head on his shoulder.

Sometimes hugs were too much.

Diluc understood.

"I don't kn-know what's wrong r-right now," Kaeya blew out another breath, "To be qu-quite honest..."

Diluc nodded, "That's okay."

"Can you hug me please? I'm sorry I flinched..." Kaeya's voice was small.

Diluc hummed, "It's alright..." He draped an arm over his brother's shoulders- a comforting weight without being truly restrictive- "You don't have to apologize for that, K."

"I just feel... very bad... but I don't know exactly why..."

"That's alright, Kaeya. We'll figure it out, okay?"

Kaeya nodded.

Diluc regretted letting him see his injuries... that had been a large, and wholly *unnecessary* point of stress...

But he truly had thought Kaeya had seen them at least once when Jean treated him at the cathedral.

And he also truly had assumed that Kaeya knew the nature of the burns...

He sighed.

First night home, and things were going great.

"Can I play with your hair?" Diluc leaned back, trying to make eye contact, "I can try a braid, if you'd like?"

It was almost dinner time, and Kaeya kind of needed his hair out of his face anyway.

His brother's own fingers weren't dexterous enough at the moment for anything other than a sloppy ponytail.

Plus Kaeya always liked having his hair touched.

Two birds.

Kaeya's expression immediately smoothed, "Oh... yes, that would be nice..."

~~~~~



NOT ME FOLLOWING THROUGH AND POSTING WHEN I SAID I WOULD  
WOO!

I would like to throw out there that i do not know medical things so if anything doesn't  
make sense...

from the bottom of my heart, my bad

~~~~

I'm good for a chapter next week :)

~~~~

## Chapter 14

### Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

#### *Kaeya*

Kaeya curled into the unfamiliar sheets of the unfamiliar room.

The bed was comfortable- much more so than what he'd been sleeping on at the cathedral, but it was unfamiliar all the same...

"Everything alright, Kaeya? Any lingering pain?" Adelinde knelt within view. She tucked a strand of hair behind his ear.

Kaeya worked his jaw, "I'm... fine... I think."

Adelinde nodded with a deep sigh, "Alright... Well, I'll be up for a while if you need anything. And someone will be awake in the staff room all night. I trust you remember how the bell system works?"

Kaeya huffed, "I do, yes... Which one for you?"

Adelinde smiled, "I'll be in the kitchen until around midnight. But then I won't be on duty again until noon tomorrow."

Kaeya hummed, and his brow furrowed.

"If those hours need to be a bit more flexible, then that can be arranged, my little knight."

Kaeya blinked as he felt his cheeks warm. Adelinde hadn't called him that since...

Probably since he'd first made it into the knights.

Kaeya grumbled, "I think I'll manage just fine, thank you..."

Adelinde hid a laugh behind a hand, "Ah. Just as easily embarrassed as ever!"

She ran gentle fingers through his bangs, then pressed a kiss to his forehead, "Sleep well, Kaeya. Ask for help if you need it, please."

Kaeya nodded, "I will, Adie. Thank you."

Adelinde gave him another smile, "Your brother's in the next room over as well. You're not alone by any stretch, okay?"

Kaeya hummed.

Adelinde nodded and stood.

Kaeya's door had barely closed before he turned toward his wall. He reached up past his headboard and tapped out a very specific rhythm.

He waited...

He bit his lip, disappointed as the seconds ticked by.

But then-

An answering knock- the same rhythm back- almost questioning.

Kaeya blew out a relieved sigh. He tapped out the next part.

Diluc answered immediately this time.

Kaeya finally relaxed.

~~~~~

Diluc

Diluc's head practically snapped up as he could have sworn he heard a faint knock on the wall near his bed.

He'd been at the small desk in the corner, reading through intel reports- most of which were centered around Treasure Hoarder activity. Obviously.

He frowned, not certain if he'd actually heard it, or if he'd imagined it.

He stood stiffly, then climbed up on the bed, sitting on his knees. He pressed an ear to the wall and listened intently.

He could just barely make out the shuffle of movement on the other side.

He considered for a moment...

*Well, it's not like it would hurt to get his attention even if he **didn't** start it...*

Diluc knocked their standard greeting.

It wasn't Morse code. It was similar, but they'd both made it up together when they were kids.

Diluc couldn't actually remember the code itself, but the handful of phrases they used the most were still stuck in his memory.

He might actually be able to tease out at least a partial alphabet from those-

Kaeya tapped one that Diluc... didn't remember...

Diluc huffed.

Of course you actually remember the code itself...

He leaned closer to the wall, "I don't remember that one, K."

Rustling, then an extremely muffled, "What?"

"I said I don't remember that one." A little louder.

More rustling, then a disappointed, "Oh..." A pause, "I ...if ... okay?"

Diluc huffed and wondered if he should just go over there. Certain words were muffled as to be

unintelligible. Though he got the gist.

Diluc frowned, “I wonder why guests haven’t complained about the walls being too thin...?”

“What?”

Diluc rolled his eyes, “I said I’m fine, K. Go to sleep.”

He pressed his ear to the wall when Kaeya didn’t immediately answer.

Maybe I should check on him...

Kaeya had seemed alright during dinner, but his brother was also notoriously exceptional at putting on a brave face-

But right as the thought ended, a few more knocks sounded, and it was one Diluc recognized.

He snorted, “Sap...” He smiled, “I love you too, little brother.”

He tapped his answer back.

~~~~~

## Chapter End Notes

This is an abnormally short chapter for me  
I did not realize how short it was lol

but I am good for a chapter next week! And stuff's gonna like, actually kind of happen- or start to happen at least

# Chapter 15

## Chapter Summary

Diluc meets with Vile!

## Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

*\*a few days later\**

*Diluc*

Diluc leaned his back into the stone of the windmill, his boot tapping out an anxious... to call it a rhythm would imply that it had sense, and cadence.

His boot tapped erratically against stone.

He'd been waiting for nearly an hour. The sun was almost coming up...

And while he was in discreet clothing- hood hiding his hair and all- in the light of day, if anyone bothered to take a second glance they would likely recognize him.

He'd bristled when Kaeya directed him to dress this way...

He felt so... open... so vulnerable...

—

*-last night-*

“It’s an act of faith- of trust, brother-“ Kaeya’s arms had crossed over his chest. He was clearly getting irritated with Diluc’s anxiety... “She’s risking much more than you are. You are simply out for a walk during an unpleasant bout of insomnia. *She* doesn’t know who is or is not as likely to slit her throat as fill her coin purse. Seeing your face helps.”

Diluc grumbled something about *her* slitting *his* throat...

Kaeya’s frown morphed into a glare- “Right. Because I would send you right into the wolves’ maw- while injured, no less. Do you really think I would suggest this- would ask this of you if I did not already trust her implicitly?”

Guilt had shut him up real quick...

It was their first... almost-argument in a while. Diluc had been very careful- very quick to back down from anything that might morph into a fight.

But this time he’d been nervous- borderline paranoid, really, and his anxiety had run unchecked as a result-

Intel exchanges were never safe, and rarely simple...

Kaeya's expression softened, 'If you help me to the cart and drive, I'm decent enough with the crutches that *I* can handle-'

"ABSO- *FUCKING* -LUTELY NOT." Diluc felt certain his shout could shatter glass.

Kaeya's flinch... Kaeya's flinch caused a heavy blanket of silence to fall...

Diluc refused to be the one to lift it... he had no right.

"Perhaps..." His little brother's voice had grown small after that, "Perhaps Elzer could-"

"No." Diluc gritted his teeth, "I'll go, it's fine. I'm sorry for yelling."

—

And now here he stood, back stiff from holding the specific pose for so long...

He fidgeted- stretched, then leaned and once again crossed his legs- right over left. It was awkward to stand like this. Especially for so long.

He moved to scratch at his cheek, but stopped himself. It wouldn't bode well if his face was bleeding through its bandages when the informant finally showed.

*If* the informant finally showed...

He re-crossed his arms-

*Wait- is it right over left or-*

"You look out of place. Are you waiting to watch the sunrise?" A voice, feminine, clear and unstrained, low in pitch- she sounded somewhat young, which was good- matched what Kaeya said-

Diluc did not turn to look- no matter how loudly every nerve ending in his body screamed at him to do so- "A shadow is not out of place amongst shadows. The sunlight blinds me."

The woman hummed.

*Now* Diluc turned. Slowly.

A cloaked figure stood before him. She was small in stature- slight. Though that meant nothing in a fight. A knife's flash required skill, not bulk, after all...

Diluc studied her, wary.

A hood hid most of her hair- though auburn bangs peeked through to cast shadows over brown eyes. A mask hid her mouth and nose.

Her head tilted, and her eyes narrowed. They were sharp, discerning, "Shadows do not suit you."

*'I've never worked with you before.'*

Diluc swallowed, "I'll make them fit."

*'You can trust me.'*

Another hum, and a smile tilted her eyes, "Fascinating... such high end clientele..."

That... wasn't part of the script...

"Uhh..." Diluc blinked somewhat stupidly.

Vile's arms crossed over her chest, "Relax. We're good. Any specific questions?"

"Oh, uh..." He'd cased and cleared the area ahead of time- thoroughly. But still his eyes darted nervously-

The woman's abrupt change to a friendly tone didn't really help- he was too wound up, and he still didn't trust-

"I've been looking into the Simpleton. In search of his Golden Goose." She cut him off- offering... whatever *that* was unexpectedly.

"S-Simpleton?"

Vile nodded, "Given the Golden Goose."

"G-Golden-"

Her eyes narrowed, "Hmm... He didn't give you everything... did he...?"

Diluc floundered. He was supposed to be good at this. He was *usually* good at this, dammit!

"Relax, Dawn. Simple hoarders. Golden information to..." Diluc could imagine the woman's lips pursing behind the mask, "Lure out a goose...?" She sounded unsure of herself, her brow furrowed, clearly waiting to see if he'd catch on...

Diluc got the jist.

*Wait, did she just call Kaeya a goose?*

He worked his jaw, "Does... does the golden information have... details? Or- uh... are there details in the golden information...?"

*Awkward awkward AWKWARD-*

Diluc wanted to scream. He didn't.

His nature was too direct for this bullshit.

*Kaeya, why did you do this to me-?*

*What sort of code even is this??*

Vile sighed, "This is difficult... He should have taught you more of our code..." Her finger rubbed between her eyebrows, "No matter, the area's clear and circumstances are... strange." She stepped closer, and her voice lowered, "I've been looking into the Treasure Hoarders- anyone possibly or tangentially related to The Group." Her eyebrows raised. She didn't want to say which group specifically.

Diluc knew anyway.

He could at least figure out that much...

“I don’t know what exactly they used to draw him out- though I’m sure you already do.” Her eyebrows rose in a question.

Diluc grunted.

Vile nodded, “You’ll be pleased to know I’ve found no details on that particular front, so whatever it is, it has not spread.”

Diluc felt his shoulders slump in a sudden release of tension that could only be described as intense, palpable relief.

Vile grimaced. Or Diluc assumed she did, by the way her eyes scrunched, “That big of a skeleton in the closet, huh?”

Diluc clenched his jaw.

Vile sighed and continued, “More deals are being made,” She held out a small booklet, “Nothing else needs to be said out loud, but guard this well, please.”

Diluc took it in a shaking hand.

The woman’s brow furrowed, “Are you well, Dawn?”

Diluc blinked, “Dawn?”

“A fitting name for a man of fire.” Her eyes scoured him, “Are you well?”

Diluc worked his jaw, “No, admittedly.”

Tremors occasionally plagued him. Sometimes they seemed related to stress. Sometimes Diluc was simply convinced that his body was deciding to give up on him entirely.

Vile hummed, “Hide that fact, and find your friends. The wolves are opportunistic.” Her gaze darted to the side. She was looking at a wall, which Diluc found somewhat confusing-

Her tone dropped. It dripped with venom, “As are the fucking clowns...”

Diluc felt his eyes widen in surprise. Because behind that wall was the Grand Goth Hotel.

A man in a mask. Obviously.

It wasn’t like he didn’t have his suspicions. But his own conduits could find *nothing* to connect the Fatui to the incident.

Diluc hummed, and for the first time in this conversation he felt something akin to excitement- “Do you have proof-”

*Or- wait- she could just be saying the loss of a Captain leaves Mond weak-*

Vile’s gaze darted to the small notebook, then back up to him.

‘Stop asking questions.’

Diluc nodded, still feeling unsure, but relieved to at least finally have *something*. He tucked the book safely into his coat, “Thank you.” He pulled out a mora pouch- the amount already counted out, with a bit extra thrown in for having to deal with a stranger-



Vile held a hand up and took a step back, “Friends and family discount.”

Diluc stood there, brow furrowed, like an idiot.

Vile’s toe scuffed the ground, “How... How is he...?” Her eyes suddenly looked somewhat... There was a shine to them that wasn’t there previously.

Diluc finally lowered the hand that was still holding the money. He let his tone soften, “Better. Not... Not *well*, but definitely better...”

Vile hummed. Then she sighed heavily, “Meet me here. Same day and time. I’ll hopefully have more for you.”

“Thank you.”

She nodded, “Is there anything else you’d like me to look into?” Her hand came up to rub sheepishly at the back of her neck, “I apologize for... I kind of took over this particular exchange...”

Diluc frowned, “No, this... this is all I need. And anything else you can provide pertaining to it is... appreciated.”

Vile nodded, “Things are strange, Dawn. There’s trickery at play that even I’m... still confused by. Be careful.”

“I understand, thank you.”

~~~~~

Kaeya

Kaeya was certain he was going to lose what was left of his mind.

He sat in the front parlor, on the corner of the couch that made it easiest to see out into the courtyard.

A book lay open on his lap- a joke of an act, playing at relaxation-

Kaeya jumped as a hand tapped his shoulder lightly.

He also gasped like a scandalized southern belle.

Because even unintentionally, he was nothing if not Dramatic™.

“Apologies, Kaeya. I did not mean to scare you,” Adelinde’s voice was gentle.

Kaeya forced a tight smile, “Ah... that’s alright, there’s not much that doesn’t scare me these days-” He felt his eye widen. Because that was not funny. Or even a joke, actually- it was blatantly true, but that didn’t mean he should say it- “I- I mean-”

Adelinde sighed, “That’s alright, Kae. May I sit with you? I brought you some coffee.”

Kaeya blinked at the mugs in her hands- “Oh, yes, please do, Adie...”

He set his untouched book aside.

Adeline handed one of the drinks over, and Kaeya took it with a thank you.

Adeline settled close, then also turned to stare out toward the courtyard, “When should we expect them back?” She took a sip of her drink.

Kaeya hummed and did the same, “Vile could show any time between 4 and 8 am. Depends if she accidentally sleeps in.”

Adeline raised an eyebrow toward him.

Kaeya shrugged, “What? She’s human too.”

“8 am is well past sun-up, Kaeya.”

He hummed and took another drink, “She contacted *me* which speaks of urgency. She’ll probably get there early today...”

She’d *technically* contacted Charles. Since he was the one doing regular sweeps of Kaeya’s apartment. Vile had left a note behind a loose brick. Kaeya had actually almost forgotten to mention that mode of communication-

But that didn’t really matter. What mattered was that Kaeya’s apartment remained clean and clear- and his best informant apparently had something for him.

Kaeya sighed shakily and took another sip of his coffee.

The woman wasn’t... necessarily timely. Normally.

At least not with him.

Kaeya didn’t usually mind so much. Controlling the meetings gave Vile a bit more power. Which was something that Kaeya was more than willing to cede (barring extenuating circumstances of course), given how tenuous her existence often was.

And being somewhat unpredictable gave her a bit more safety, which Kaeya would wholeheartedly encourage- should Vile need advice (she didn’t).

Vile was a shadow, and Kaeya was patient.

And she was damn good at her job.

Kaeya snickered into his mug as he thought about how *miserable* Diluc must be.

Because Diluc was many things.

Patient was not one of them.

He let the small amusement soothe some of his anxiety.

Of all of his informants, Vile was the only one he’d like to consider a friend. (Like to, but probably couldn’t, by the very nature of their positions.)

She was also the most dependable by far. Kaeya rarely had to double check anything she gave him.

Kaeya trusted her implicitly, which was why he did not hesitate to send Diluc in his stead. Danger had not occurred to him.

And now Kaeya wondered if that complacency was going to get his brother hurt just as it had very nearly gotten *him* killed.

A meeting with an informant...

One he didn't trust, and who was actively threatening him at the time, sure, but still Kaeya had been stupidly overconfident- in both his wit and combat skills.

And if he was being honest, it wasn't as though he'd had much of a choice-

The situations weren't similar. He'd sent Diluc to Vile. Kaeya trusted Vile-

"The situation isn't similar..."

He only realized he'd mumbled that bit out loud when Adelinde's hand squeezed his shoulder.

"They should be back soon, shall I have the kitchen staff cook up something?"

Kaeya hummed, but said nothing else.

He felt bad not answering. But his brain was struggling to fully process the question, let alone formulate a response.

He set his chin in his hand and continued staring out the window, watching the lanterns flicker in the darkness before dawn. The pressure against where his two fingers used to be still caused a dull ache.

He couldn't decide if the pain was a nice distraction, or if it made him feel worse-

"Kaeya?" Adelinde leaned, attempting to catch eye contact, "Could you focus on me for a bit, sweetie?"

Kaeya grunted. His eyes stayed glued to what he could see of the path leading up to the main courtyard.

*If Diluc and Elzer don't come back I swear by **all** the stars both alive and dead-*

"Kaeya. Look at me." Adelinde's hand gently turned his cheek.

Kaeya fought to not flinch away from it.

Adelinde's other hand found his other cheek, and her grip was soft, but insistent, "Breathe with me."

Kaeya only realized he truly was in full Distress™ when Adelinde's thumbs gently rubbed tears away.

He forced himself to breathe as guilt clawed violently through his gut.

Adelinde didn't deserve this... She shouldn't have to deal with this- today was supposed to be her day off.

"I'm f-fine-"

"Let's list some things and make sure, hm? How does that sound?" Her smile was bright and comforting.

Kaeya nodded.

“Let’s see...” One hand left Kaeya’s face as Adelinde tapped at her chin in thought, “How about... favorite foods?” Her head tilted, “I’ll start: pancakes.”

Kaeya huffed something that almost approximated a laugh, “C-Coffee...”

“That’s a drink, Master Kaeya.” The disapproval in her tone greatly outweighed the inconsequential nature of the conversation.

Kaeya blinked, “Oh... Uh... chicken...”

“Just chicken? Cooked any old way?”

Kaeya blinked some more, “Skewers. Marinated overnight... cooked quickly at high heat with mushrooms...”

Adelinde smiled, “Now *that’s* a dish!”

Kaeya snorted, “It’s *your* signature dish...”

“Hmm,” Adelinde’s face scrunched as she hummed, “I wouldn’t say ‘signature’. My sticky honey roast on the other hand, is to die for.”

“Your chicken skewers are my favorite...” Kaeya realized that his shoulders had actually relaxed somewhat. The tension in his neck had also loosened considerably, “I could never get them to taste the same... But-” He straightened a fraction. His voice also carried a bit more life- “I did come up with my own recipe for the marinade. It’s pretty unique. I think, anyway...”

“Oh?” Adelinde’s eyes lit up, and her thumb rubbed his cheek, “Has my little protege struck out on his own? Truly?”

Kaeya rolled his eyes and leaned back a fraction as embarrassment colored his cheeks. He grumbled a bit, though it wasn’t coherent-

“I can’t understand you when you mumble little bug.”

Now his cheeks were on fire- “Well, *now* I’m saying that I’m not little-”

“Yes you are! You’re my tiny little star-”

“I’m 6’1”!”

“It’s less a matter of height and age, and more the fact that I used to hold you on my hip when you were tiny-”

Kaeya groaned, “Adelinde...”

“Oh boo hoo.” Adelinde’s hands found her hips. It dawned on Kaeya to wonder what she’d done with her coffee- “It’s been too long since I’ve gotten to tease you. You can and you will accept it graciously.”

Kaeya huffed and his eye narrowed, “Fine.” He let his lips curl into a smirk, and he waved a casual hand, “I’ve surpassed you in cooking, anyway. I’ll let you get your wins where you can, since your ‘little protege’ has a few tricks of his own now.”

“Oh, bold words, Master Kaeya. Does this mean you’ll be cooking dinner tonight?”

Kaeya laughed, “Sure! I’ll need help, though.” He thought about it, “It would be kind, I think, to give the kitchen staff a surprise evening off...”

Adeline hummed, “It would, yes.” She picked her mug up from the low table and took a long sip. She smiled, “Oh now I’m excited. I haven’t cooked with my little helper in years-”

She pinched his cheek, and Kaeya swatted her hand away in mock irritation.

“Hey now, *you’re* the little helper today!”

“Ah, true true!” Her laugh melted away all remaining anxiety.

Kaeya finished off his own coffee before setting the empty mug aside. He was getting excited- it had been a while since he’d cooked for other people!

Although, he needed to be honest with himself- Adeline really would be doing the bulk of the work...

He knew *she* knew that, going in. He just had to be sure to temper his own expectations.

They’d use his recipe (which he was really looking forward to getting her opinion on), but Kaeya was too weak to stay on his feet for long. Additionally, he couldn’t really carry much (if anything) with the crutches, and he couldn’t actually go all that far either because using them properly hurt his still-healing hand quite badly.

He could sort of make do with one crutch, or a cane, even, on a good day. But today his knee was quite sore.

And generally, he really didn’t want to push it. He needed to be careful... His final assessment before surgery was in a week.

And he’d be *completely* immobile all over again after *that* ...

He shook his head lightly to clear it.

“Alright, what do we have? Is the kitchen fully stocked, Adie?”

Adeline nodded, “Mhm, Hillie and Moco did the shopping yesterday, as a matter of fact.”

“Perfect! We’ll need to let the chicken sit for at least a few hours. Overnight would be better, but that’s alright,” He tapped his chin, “We’ll also need a bottle or two of sweet dandelion wine-”

Adeline’s eyebrow rose-

Kaeya blinked and waved a hand- “For *cooking*, Adie! I know I can’t drink on these painkillers-”

He tried not to let her expression bug him too much. It was enough that Diluc kept giving him shit.

He also didn’t even bother mentioning that he hadn’t actually taken any of the medicines that might interact. Just the lighter painkillers.

He was trying to be *really* careful with the stronger ones, and he wasn’t certain that Adeline would approve of him weaning himself off-

“For cooking?”

“Yes, I marinate the chicken in a mix of wine and spices. The alcohol cooks out rapidly, there’s nothing to worry about.”

Adeline hummed, “I see. You’ll have to show me exactly which wine you use.” She seemed to think for a moment, “I can imagine it being good. Depending.”

Kaeya nodded, “It is! Uhh... usually.”

Kaeya was by no means a bad cook. But his usual recipes were, quite literally, what Adeline had taught him when he was young- followed to the letter.

He’d only experimented and come up with his own take on the chicken marinade because he was drunk one day, and extremely frustrated that he couldn’t get his own skewers to taste the same as Adeline’s.

If he hadn’t had leftovers that were surprisingly tasty to morning-Kaeya, he probably would have forgotten the entire experiment completely.

He was lucky that he was a nerd even while drunk, because he’d taken copious notes- his kitchen looked like Albedo’s lab after an all nighter, with sloppily written instructions, thoughts, and measurements strewn all about.

It wasn’t even all that complicated of a recipe...

In any case, sober-morning-Kaeya had almost tossed the scribbles in the garbage.

Wouldn’t that have been tragic?

—

Kaeya was writing out ingredients for a few different sides he’d been wanting to try making when the front door opened.

He startled so badly that his pencil pressed an ugly streak almost all the way across the page.

He blinked down at it as his breath stuttered.

Adeline pretended not to notice and stood to greet Diluc and Elzer.

“Ahh... how did it go, boys?” Adeline moved to take Diluc’s coat.

Diluc waved her off, “Adie, you’re not working today, relax...” He shrugged the coat off and moved toward the hall closet himself.

Elzer followed, removing his own jacket.

Diluc hung them both, “Went well, we think. Kaeya will have to tell us more.”

Kaeya blinked as he felt his head tilt. He waited.

Diluc noticed his questioning stare, “It’s all in code. I’m assuming you’ll know it-” He patted at his pockets. His expression pinched into a frown as he seemed to be looking for something-

“I have it, sir,” Elzer pulled a small brown notebook out of his vest. He turned toward Kaeya, “I’m

sure I could crack it, given enough time, but that would... be a waste.” He sounded disappointed.

Kaeya grinned.

Elzer liked puzzles. Always had-

He reached a hand out- silently asking for the booklet, and in two short strides Elzer was standing before him.

Kaeya cracked it open, and the butler continued to hover close.

Kaeya snickered, “Ah, yes. This is...” His eyes narrowed, “Hmm... She must be feeling especially anxious. We don’t normally use this one...”

“What sort of cipher is it, sir?” Elzer leaned a little closer, “Seems like a bilateral substitution to me-”

Kaeya pulled the notebook away with a scowl- “Back up, E-”

Kaeya could swear the man’s eye twitched.

He snorted, “Why don’t I translate it for Diluc, then you can have the undeciphered text to chew on as you please? Hm?”

A ghost of a smile tilted Elzer’s lips, “Ah, yes! It has been a while since I’ve had a worthy puzzle-”

Diluc rolled his eyes as he stepped around Elzer to plop himself next to Kaeya on the couch- “He *will* solve it, Kaeya. Are you sure you want to give up Vile’s code?”

Kaeya shrugged, then grabbed a few fresh sheets of paper from the table, “It’s one of mine actually, not hers. I’ll just tell her not to use it anymore.”

Diluc hummed as Kaeya started translating the first line from memory.

Elzer pointedly left the room- he clearly didn’t want the fun spoiled.

Adeline sat on his other side, and her hand found Kaeya’s shoulder, “Why don’t you give Diluc the key, Kaeya? Since you don’t intend to use it again anyway?”

Kaeya frowned as he copied down the first word, “It’s no trouble, and it’s not as if you all can’t reverse engineer it from the-”

“I like Adeline’s idea, K. I can translate, you go relax.”

‘Go relax.’

Diluc had been saying that a lot lately...

Kaeya’s head snapped up. He glared first at Diluc, then at Adeline- “But-”

“We were going to go cook, remember?” Adeline’s brow was furrowed and her smile was tight.

Practically pleading.

Kaeya blinked, “Right... Okay...” He quickly scribbled out the key and shoved both it and the notebook into Diluc’s lap.

Diluc sighed, “Kaeya, it’s not personal-”

“You’re right, I probably won’t handle it well. It’s fine.” Kaeya could hear how *not* fine it was in his own tone. Despite the fact that he really was putting effort into hiding the hurt-

“Kaeya-”

“I said it’s *fine*, Diluc! It’s not a big deal!” His breath came out in a puff. His vision felt cold against his thigh.

Oh not this again-

It wasn’t enough that he was obviously upset anyway. But now his divinely gifted rock had to give even more obvious physical proof-

He groaned in frustration, then dropped his face into his hands.

Adeline rubbed gentle circles into his back, “It’s alright, Kaeya. You’re allowed to be upset.”

He grumbled in response.

Diluc just kept sitting there, tightly clutching both the notebook and Kaeya’s translation key- “Vile... seemed worried about you...”

Kaeya groaned again- “Gee, thanks-”

Diluc huffed, “That is not an insult! I am saying she obviously cares about you!”

Oh.

Yeah, I guess that is nice-

“Oh...”

Diluc rolled his eyes as Kaeya sat up a fraction, “You don’t have to take everything personally you-”

“Diluc.” Adeline cut him off quickly and mercilessly- “Go translate. Now.”

His brother blinked, but then Diluc's shoulders slumped and he stood, “I... right... alright...”

Kaeya actually felt a little bad, all told.

It was still... *so* strange how he and Diluc would teeter toward a shouting match...

Then just as quickly teeter away.

It was all his brother’s efforts (and Adeline’s, especially in this case). Kaeya knew that he himself was exceptionally volatile lately.

Go figure.

He was starting to wonder how much it would take before they got tired of his bullshit-

“Shall we start prepping ingredients, Kaeya?” Adeline’s hand rubbed a circle into his back.

Kaeya realized he’d been glaring lasers through the floor for quite a while... “Um... Yeah... Yeah

that's... a good idea..."

Adeline gave his shoulder a firm squeeze, then she pulled him close and pressed a kiss to his temple. His right temple- along the edge of his scar- though it was well-hidden by his hair...

I think... there might be bugs under my skin...

Kaeya gritted his teeth.

"Let's go be distracted, yes?" Adeline stood and held out her hands.

Kaeya let her pull him to his feet and help situate him on his crutches.

~~~~~

## Chapter End Notes

Kaeya @ Diluc: Go do this thing, it's not a big deal it'll be fine-

Diluc: ... okay...

\*Two Hours Later\*

Kaeya: OH MY GOD I CAN'T BELIEVE I TOLD HIM TO GO DO THE THING IM A HORRIBLE BROTHER HE'S GONNA GET HURT OR WORSE-

\*devolves into incoherent panic\*

~~~~~

Chapter next week!

End Notes

Thank you for reading!!

You can find me goofin' off on tumblr: [hola-its-olo](https://hola-its-olo.tumblr.com/)

Feel free to say hi! ☺

I'm always happy to chat about Genshin haha

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